SEPT. 27, 2004

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IRAQ AND 1,000 LIVES
The Editors

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THE REPUBLICANS POLITICIZE TERROR

EGUM AND DAVID SIROTA

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LETTERS

R.O. BLECHMAN

PLUMB TUCKERED

Arlington, Va.

■ *The Nation*'s website quotes praise for Eric Alterman as "the most honest...media critic writing today." It's hard to imagine how anyone would reach that conclusion after reading Alterman's August 30/September 6 "The Liberal Media" column, titled, "PBS Adds Insult to Injury," which heavily criticizes the PBS program I produce, *Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered*. Honesty requires at least a modicum of accuracy, but Alterman fumbles again and again.

Referring to Carlson, Alterman offers a laundry list of "the purposely inflammatory demagogy of PBS's newest host." The hit parade of Carlson comments Alterman offers may indeed run contrary to *The Nation*'s editorial positions. The only problem is that Carlson has not uttered a single one of them on his PBS program. We checked. Alterman, who clearly didn't, seems to have confused Carlson's PBS program, *Unfiltered*, with CNN's *Crossfire*.

It's fine to criticize Carlson for his *Crossfire* comments, but to suggest, as Alterman did, that *Crossfire*-style comments are a staple of Carlson's PBS program is just plain sloppy. Now, I wouldn't dare imagine that Alterman's sloppiness was in deliberate service of his shaky argument. But it seems to undermine his suggestion that PBS is being overtaken by "conservative demagogy." His confusion of the two programs is particularly puzzling, given that *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel has appeared on the program twice, including in its inaugural broadcast, and *Nation* national affairs correspondent William Greider appeared shortly thereafter.

If our program is, as Alterman charges, part of a "far-right campaign" to undermine public broadcasting, *The Nation* should be indicted as a co-conspirator. The indictment might also include Richard Cohen, Jonathan Rauch, Michelle Cottle, Paul Krugman, Al Sharpton and others decidedly left of center. All have appeared on the program in its short life.

Alterman also calls Carlson and other conservatives on public television "unabashedly partisan and journalistically challenged ideologues." In our nine shows, Carlson has repeatedly criticized President Bush, the Republican Congressional agenda and the war in Iraq. Unabashed? We certainly hope so. But partisan? In whose service?

As for "journalistically challenged," well gosh, I certainly would be embarrassed if the factual content of our program was as unreliable as Alterman's. I would also be embarrassed if we said that *The Nation* was based in Washington, when everyone knows it can only exist in Manhattan. But Alterman places WETA, the producing station for *Unfiltered*, in New York, not Washington, where it has been for forty-plus years.

Alterman also wrote that WETA is the producer of the forthcoming *Wall Street Journal* program for PBS. We'd love the business, but it went to our friends at New York's WNET, which will begin broadcasting it this month. WNET will, of course, continue to offer its viewers the rabidly right-wing musings of Bill Moyers. After all, a conservative takeover this clumsy needs all the help it can get.

ERIC WAGNER, *senior producer*
Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered

ALTERMAN REPLIES

New York City

■ Eric Wagner certainly does have a bee in his bonnet, but just what put it there is unclear. He devotes most of his angry missive to denying an accusation I never made. Nowhere in my column do I even imply that Tucker Carlson made his remarks on his PBS program—any more than I implied that the *Wall Street Journal* editors read their Lyndon LaRouche–sourced editorials on the air back in 1988. The point was that of all the pundits in all the gin joints in all the world, PBS picked not only one who already enjoys five appearances a week on a commercial cable station but one who thought a case in which recourse was sought for a 3-year-old whose intestines were sucked out was worthy of mockery.

Nor did I have any comments about Carlson's guest list, so all that complaining is hardly relevant. But since Wagner brings it up, Katrina vanden Heuvel has appeared only once, not twice, on the show, as he falsely claims. And what does the fact that "Richard Cohen, Jonathan Rauch, Michelle Cottle, Paul Krugman and Al Sharpton"—not one of whom has any relationship to *The Nation*—have to do with anything? (Bill O'Reilly has liberals on his program too; so what?) Finally, even if we grant that there is some sort of point here, does Wagner really wish to brag about, say, Carlson's O'Reilly-esque treatment of Paul Krugman? On the transcript available at pkarchive.org/economy/PBSCarlsonUnfiltered080604.html, Carlson informed his guest, a *New York Times* columnist, Princeton economics professor and winner of awards for academic achievement, that he had stopped taking him seriously, and then went on to misportray one of Krugman's columns. His guest was repeatedly forced to respond to distortions with comments like, "It's a misrepresentation of what I said.... I didn't say 'force'.... No. What I said was.... I didn't say that.... No, I actually don't. If you read what I wrote..." And finally, as Wagner surely knows, Bill Moyers is retiring after the election, so his "rabidly right-wing musings" will not be available to anyone but his friends and family. I did, however, confuse WETA and WNET. Sorry about that.

ERIC ALTERMAN

CHÁVEZ PACKS HIS COURT

Washington, DC

■ Alexander Cockburn questions my criticism of President Hugo Chávez's efforts to control Venezuela's Supreme Court ["Beat the Devil," July 12]. Under a new law that Chávez signed, his slim Congressional majority can name a dozen new members to the Court and can dismiss existing members on the slimmest of pretexts. In short, it can both pack and purge the country's highest court. But as Cockburn sees it, Chávez is merely doing what "FDR did, and for the same reason: that the Venezuelan court has been effectively packed the other way for decades."

Cockburn's suggestion that Chávez is unpacking a court that was packed by his predecessors ignores the fact that all the justices currently on Venezuela's Supreme Court were selected in 1999 by a National Constituent Assembly dominated by Chávez's own supporters. The comparison with FDR is still useful, however, only not in the way Cockburn suggests. FDR's effort to pack the US Supreme Court was widely repudiated and his "reform" bill failed. The Senate Judiciary Committee, dominated by Democrats who supported FDR's New Deal programs, thought it unwise to undermine the independence of the judiciary in this way. As they explained:

> We are told that a reactionary oligarchy defies the will of the majority, that this is a bill to "unpack" the Court, and give effect to the desires of the majority.... [But] it is essential to the continuance of our constitutional democracy that the judiciary be completely independent of both the executive and legislative branches of the Government.... [This bill] would subjugate the courts to the will of Congress and the President and thereby destroy the independence of the judiciary, the only certain shield of individual rights.

What would Cockburn say if President Bush and the Senate Republicans tried adding five new Justices to the Supreme Court? Surely he wouldn't call such a move a mere "irregularity," the term he uses for Chávez's court-packing scheme.

JOSÉ MIGUEL VIVANCO, *executive director*
Americas Division, Human Rights Watch

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PRINTED SEPTEMBER 8 VOLUME 279, NUMBER 9

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Cover art and design by Gene Case & Stephen Kling; illustrations by R.O. Blechman, Peter O. Zierlein

EDITORIALS

Iraq and 1,000 Deaths

The price we are paying for George W. Bush's unnecessary and illegal war in Iraq keeps rising: The number of Americans killed in the war has now passed the 1,000 mark. And the price will keep rising until Washington accepts the fact that this is a war we cannot win—and that by trying to win it, we are only further radicalizing the Iraqi people and giving life to Islamic extremists by handing them the cause of Iraqi nationalism.

The Bush Administration had hoped that the transfer of power to the interim Allawi government would quell the opposition and set the stage for elections in January. But it has become increasingly clear that the Allawi regime lacks the legitimacy and support to stabilize the country. It has also become clear that America's military presence continues to serve as a catalyst and rallying cry for a growing number of disaffected Iraqi citizens.

Indeed, since the "handover of sovereignty" at the end of June the resistance has grown in intensity and sophistication—August was the bloodiest month of the occupation, with 2,700 attacks on US troops and 1,100 soldiers wounded—and has come from more sectors of Iraqi society, both Sunni and Shiite. Reconstruction in many parts of the country has ground to a halt, and the last fifty or so international aid agencies operating in Iraq are said to be likely to leave, following the abduction of two Italian aid workers. At the same time, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has told the Security Council that the violence in Iraq could make it more difficult to go ahead with the planned elections.

Faced with this situation, the Allawi government and American military commanders have had no choice but to effectively cede more and more areas to various resistance groups, including the cities of Ramadi, Falluja, Baquba and Samarra. They have been forced to do so not just to avoid American casualties but to avoid further inflaming Iraqi opinion, particularly over military actions in or near Islamic holy sites.

At this point, there is no military solution in Iraq. Nor is there a political solution as long as the American military presence and intentions remain the issue. Confronted with these realities, supporters of the war have argued that we must nonetheless soldier on through the bad times; otherwise, the argument goes, Iraq will be reduced to chaos and will become a breeding ground for terrorism and Islamic extremism. But Iraq is *already* a breeding ground for terrorism and is nearing chaos, with more than 10,000 Iraqi civilians dead, not to mention the many thousands more without jobs or basic services.

A continued American occupation will only accelerate that disintegration by further fusing Islamic radicalism with the cause of nationalism—not just in Iraq but throughout the region. In that sense, Iraq is not a quagmire; it is, rather, a massive explosion that threatens to destroy much of the political fabric of the region and with it any prospect for real peace and political reform.

We urge political and other leaders to join us in calling for Washington to begin to withdraw US forces and to renounce any interest in maintaining military bases or in exercising control over Iraq's economy and oil resources, instead leaving the future of Iraq to the Iraqi people. Contrary to the views of those perpetuating the occupation, US disengagement from Iraq would not be a victory for terrorism or jihadism but for international law and the principle of popular sovereignty.

In going to war, many people in and around this Administration underestimated the power of nationalism and overestimated the power of the United States to shape the future of another people. In deciding whether to stay, they should not make the same mistake.

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COMMENT

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E-mail is preferred, but letters to the editor and queries may be mailed to The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003.

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2004 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept. or DPGM, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3. **When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $4 prepaid ($6 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

Putin's War

The bloody end to the hostage crisis in Beslan resulted in unfathomable human suffering. More than 300 children, parents and teachers died in the gruesome fifty-two-hour siege that began when heavily armed Chechens—and possibly other guerrillas from the Caucasus—stormed Middle School No. 1. This unconscionable slaughter of the innocents came just days after a bomber—most likely one of the "black widows," women who have lost husbands, brothers or sons at the hands of Russian forces in Chechnya—blew herself up at a Moscow subway station, killing ten and wounding scores of others, and the August 24 crashes of two airliners, apparently blown up by terrorists.

These latest acts expose the bankruptcy of President Vladimir Putin's war policy toward Chechnya. After three years of peace, negotiated by Boris Yeltsin's Kremlin with the Chechen secessionists in 1996, Putin came to power by championing a renewed military offensive in that already war-torn region. From the beginning, he built his career and image on a promise to bring permanent stability, order and security to Russia's people. Instead, his brutal policies, particularly against Chechen civilians, have spurred the wave of terrorism that now afflicts Russia. No less self-defeating has been Putin's refusal to negotiate with the Chechen government, which his troops overthrew in 1999, headed by its last freely elected President, Aslan Maskhadov. During the past two years alone, more than 1,000 Russians have been killed in a series of increasingly lethal terrorist acts inside Russia itself, including those in a Moscow theater in October 2002. Meanwhile, since the first war began in 1994, more than 100,000 Chechens, most of them civilians, have died, fueling horrifying acts like those in the Beslan school. As a surviving hostage told a Russian newspaper, "The terrorists...told us that their own children have been killed by Russians and they have nothing to lose. I asked one of them how they could put the lives of our children in danger like this. He answered that no one asked his opinion about anything when his children were being killed."

With his once-high popularity eroded by growing resentment over the Kremlin's decision to replace longstanding free social benefits with inadequate cash payments, Putin tried in a nationwide address to deflect attention from the failure of his policies by linking the recent terrorist assaults to the "war" on international terrorism. "We are dealing with the direct intervention of international terrorism against Russia," Putin insisted. His interpretation was immediately rejected by several opposition politicians as an attempt, as one put it, "to evade the responsibility for what is going on." While some foreign fighters have joined the Chechen guerrillas during the past ten years, the essential driving force behind the resistance remains a nationalist struggle. (Indeed, initial claims by Russian security forces at Beslan that the hostage takers included ten Arabs, widely reported by the Western media, have now been disclaimed by the Kremlin.)

The Bush Administration, for its part, has engaged in what the White House, under different circumstances, would call a "flip-flop." After first supporting Putin's characterization of the Beslan tragedy, the Bush State Department then urged him to negotiate:

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COMMENT

"There must be a political settlement" in Chechnya, said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. Putin angrily replied, "Why don't you meet Osama bin Laden, invite him to Brussels or to the White House and engage in talks, ask him what he wants and give it to him so he leaves you in peace?" Putin says there is nothing to negotiate because Russia's territorial integrity is at stake. But it's clear that Maskhadov would accept something less than full independence from Russia, as indeed some other ethnic republics have within the Russian Federation.

For once, the State Department is right. For the first time in many years, voices can be heard in Russia calling for a political solution as the only way out. And yet Putin continues to reject the political nature of the Chechen war, blaming everything from Yeltsin's legacy and the breakup of the Soviet Union to international terrorists and shadowy Western forces that support them, while trying to shut off discussion at home by cracking down on the media. But if he continues to refuse to negotiate with Maskhadov, who has repeatedly stated his readiness for talks and denounced the Chechen terrorists at Beslan, the situation in Russia can only grow worse: more acts of terror, possibly even against one of the country's scores of nuclear reactors; more civilian deaths on both sides; and a widening civil war throughout the Caucasus.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Pinochet, Stripped

In years past, the cronies of Gen. Augusto Pinochet—fellow generals, right-wing politicos and wealthy Chilean businessmen who profited from his seventeen-year dictatorship—have gathered on September 11 to fete the memory of his bloody rise to power. But this year's anniversary of the military coup in Chile is a lonely time for the retired strongman.

Long condemned as a pariah abroad, Pinochet has now been abandoned by his friends at home. The legacy he hoped for among his own military and the Chilean elite has *desaparecido*—disappeared, like so many of his victims. Today, Pinochet is as close as he has ever been to being prosecuted for crimes ranging from "illicit enrichment" to international terrorism.

Until only a few weeks ago, the 88-year-old general appeared destined to live out his remaining years beyond the reach of justice. In July 2002 the Chilean Supreme Court closed down the long legal process against Pinochet that had begun with his October 1998 arrest in London, ruling that he suffered from "irreversible" dementia. "I have a clean conscience," Pinochet then declared in a rather coherent statement. "The work of my government will be judged by history."

Instead, his "work" is again being judged by Chilean tribunals. On August 26 the Supreme Court essentially reversed itself; in a 9-to-8 vote, the court stripped Pinochet of his immunity, giving the green light for a special magistrate, Judge Juan Guzman, to prosecute Pinochet as the "author of the crimes of kidnapping, conspiracy and torture" in the disappearances of nineteen people during the mid-1970s.

The sudden reversal of Pinochet's legal and political fortunes is the result of the dramatic exposure of his hidden fortune in the United States. On July 15 a Senate subcommittee released a report on "Money Laundering and Foreign Corruption," which detailed evidence of secret bank accounts Pinochet had kept between 1994 and 2002 at the Washington, DC–based Riggs Bank. Riggs had been Pinochet's "personal banker," according to the report, and "deliberately assisted him in the concealment and movement of his funds while he was under investigation [during his detention in London] and the subject of a world-wide court order freezing his assets."

Some $8 million passed through these accounts. Although Pinochet's official tax returns showed that he earned only $90,000 a year as a retired general, one Riggs client profile estimated his total personal net worth at "US$ 50 to 100 MM."

Revelations of his hidden, and still unexplained, wealth created an instant uproar in Chile. Pinochet had enjoyed the image of austere, selfless incorruptibility. A declassified US intelligence biography reflected this popular perception, describing him as "honest, hardworking...lives very modestly."

But with the "*Pinocheques*" scandal, as it has come to be known in Chile, Pinochet joins the ranks of the Somozas and Duvaliers as a greed-driven tinhorn despot. Both his military and the *Pinochetista* political party, UDI, have moved to distance themselves from their besieged patriarch. In the past six weeks Chilean authorities have opened inquiries into the unidentified sources of Pinochet's riches. Like a Chilean Al Capone, Pinochet now faces the prospect of being convicted of tax evasion.

The corruption scandal clearly had an impact on the August ruling to lift Pinochet's immunity for human rights crimes. Internal Riggs memorandums show that between August 2000 and April 2002—the very time frame during which the Chilean courts were evaluating Pinochet's claims of mental infirmity—Riggs officials surreptitiously sent thirty-eight cashier's checks, totaling $1.9 million, directly to Pinochet, who then cashed them at various Santiago banks. The image of the general orchestrating the secret transfer of funds and personally cashing the $50,000 checks, even as he submitted brief after brief to convince the courts that he was crippled by dementia, provided significant ammunition for his victims to argue that the court had been snookered. "How can he be mad to kill, but sane to steal?" as one lawyer, Eduardo Contreras, put it to the justices during oral arguments.

The Supreme Court ruling opens the way for Judge Guzman to pursue Pinochet for acts of terror related to an insidious component of his military regime: Operation Condor. Under Pinochet, the Chilean secret police organized what declassified US intelligence documents described as an "international Murder Inc." among the Southern Cone countries to track down and kill leftist opponents in the region—and beyond. Guzman's investigation into the disappearance of nineteen Condor victims promises to reveal new details of how Pinochet's dictatorship collaborated with Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and other regimes to create and operate in the mid-1970s what amounted to the world's largest state-sponsored network of international terrorists.

General Pinochet, of course, will resist being held accountable to the bitter end. As *The Nation* went to press, his lawyers were filing motions to remove Guzman as special prosecutor and had blocked, at least temporarily, the judge's subpoena for Pinochet to

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COMMENT

submit to a formal interrogation on his role in authorizing and overseeing Condor operations. But while Pinochet could eventually manage, through legal maneuvering or death, to escape final judicial reckoning, it is clear that the impunity of his actions, and the immunity of his legacy among his closest supporters, has been stripped away once and for all. PETER KORNBLUH

Peter Kornbluh is the author of The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability, *just published in paperback.*

Infotainment at the RNC

With the candidates in the bag, and no hope of drama, the Democratic and Republican conventions can be fairly judged only as extended advertisements for the parties that staged them. Just as Mel Gibson's recent cross-and-sandal epic succeeds as Passion play and disappoints as conventional movie narrative, the goal of the undertaking is disconnected from that of the critic. The convention mix of carefully orchestrated speechifying, recorded campaign ads and tributes, and live entertainment adds up to something not quite sport, not quite news and not quite commercial—it is a pageant without a competition.

The floor at the Republican event was like the set of some giant multicamera movie production, with attendant EPK (Electronic Press Kit—those behind-the-scenes movie promo things you see on *Entertainment Tonight*) crews and celeb-stalking reporters. There were the stars—John McCain and Rudy and Arnold and Laura and Dick and W in his many incarnations; the supporting and bit players—each speaker demographically chosen to hammer home a specific point; and the extras: the delegates.

To keep the extras happy and energized for their onscreen duties, they must be informed, fed and entertained. They are not, however, your target audience—if they have even a moderately miserable time, they will still go to see your picture (vote for your candidate) because they had a role in it. The scene—the picture that you send out into the world—remains the goal.

Entertainment at the convention came in two categories—that meant to inform, excite and influence the viewing audience and that meant just to keep the extras from getting restless between setups. The appointment of Frank Breeden, former head of the Gospel Music Association, to coordinate this aspect of the pageant suggested a religious bent to the performances that did not pan out. With celebrities of various luminance like Ron Silver, the Governator, reality-show Survivor Elisabeth Hasselbeck, football favorites Lynn Swann and Jason Sehorn and Miss America taking the platform to speak, the thin line between politics and entertainment was faintly drawn. The house band—New York professionals dressed usually in a neutral black—filled gaps and generated pep-rally energy with a supply of upbeat R&B standards: "Knock on Wood," "Dancin' in the Streets," "Soul Man," "I Feel Good"—the stuff you hear canned during timeouts at professional sporting events and that seems to have become, since *Animal House*, a locus of frat-boy nostalgia. With little rehearsal time, their Big Apple chops were impressive—if anybody's got a wedding reception planned, I'm sure the RNC can help you track them down.

Though a Broadway medley by more black-clad New Yorkers the first night seemed a bit showbizzy, the bulk of the acts were well performed and well integrated into the proceedings. Notable exceptions were the lame skit featuring Karl Rove and Barney the dog, who should both stick to their day jobs, and the self-conscious awards-presenter routine written for the Bush twins. They were not initially announced to appear, but perhaps the rumor that the girls were not ready for prime time spurred the planners into throwing something together on short notice. The ditzy teenage patter seemed more a parody of the Hilton sisters or Beavis and Butthead (that nervous giggling) than a heartwarming peek into the First Family. And the CJs ("convention jockeys"), mostly young female press secretaries stalking the floor to anchor pseudospontaneous Q and A's with the rank and file, were overcoached in their enthusiasm, shrieking hyperbolically into their microphones (one fronting a fireman's local in Milwaukee seemed on the verge of orgasm) even when their interview subjects were relatively low-key. This sort of MC brio is common on E! and MTV shows dealing with wet T-shirts and chugging beer, but here it verged on the hysteri-

CALVIN TRILLIN

STILL SLIMING AWAY

(Karl Rove & Co. knock off Paul Simon's "Slip Slidin' Away")

Still sliming away, still sliming away.
To get our guy elected, what we do is still sliming away.

First, John McCain, a prisoner of war.
Our callers said he didn't have his marbles anymore.
They said that prison had turned him quite strange—
Not like our man, who used dad's clout to stay safely home on the range.

Still sliming away, still sliming away.
To get our guy elected, what we do is still sliming away.

John Kerry faced Charlie—just luck he returned.
So we got vets to lie that his medals weren't really earned.
They said that Kerry wasn't wounded enough,
And the slacker who'd stayed home is the hombre who's tough.

Still sliming away, still sliming away.
To get our guy elected, what we do is still sliming away.

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THE WIRE

THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON AVAILABLE ON DVD OCTOBER 12. *THE WIRE: TRUTH BE TOLD* IN BOOKSTORES SEPTEMBER 14.

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COMMENT

cal, and by the second night somebody had either slipped the bunch some Valium or told them to back off. The pop-culture references included a *Saturday Night Live* intro parody and a slew of George and Laura spots with all the trappings—dewy-eyed orchestral music, slow dissolves, inspirational voiceovers—of the pharmaceutical ads seen on the Adult Incontinence channels. A few of the rock acts seemed a little lost—nobody I asked in the Texas delegation knew who Dexter Freebish was (though somebody thought he might be running for Congress in a swing state), and the Austin band, which seemed to harken from a very clean garage, garnered mostly polite applause. Daize Shayne, surfer-star turned singer, jumping around in front of some funky-looking backup players, brought a whiff of open-mic night to the floor.

But most of the pros delivered what they were meant to. Darryl Worley sang about family and the relative fighting overseas but was not asked to deliver either his "Have You Forgotten?" or "I Miss My Friend," both emotional paeans to the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. And Sara Evans's "Born to Fly" ("But how do you wait for Heaven?/And who has that much time?/And how do you keep your feet on the ground/When you know…you were born to fly?") seemed a secular feel-good message when sandwiched between tales from the podium of successful immigrant and minority striving. Jaci Velasquez sang an energetic but generic "Con Tu Amor," and Dana Glover, with her powerful white-soul voice, got to sing more than one number. The segue, without introduction, from mourning relatives of fallen heroes to Daniel Rodriguez's tenor rendition of "Amazing Grace" was obvious and effective, and he has the skill not to fall into the bagpipe drone that often ruins the song. Brooks and Dunn were perhaps the most on-message, singing of the opportunity available "Only in America" ("We all get a chance/Everybody gets to dance"). None of the songs or performers had the edge of danger or sex (just as at the Democratic show), no outlaw honky-tonkers, tragic drug-addled waifs or angry, cursing rappers graced the stage, which is to be expected. My disappointment with Christian rock has always been its lack of extremity, of the aching sorrow or joy, the celebration or desperation that fuels the best rock and traditional black gospel music. It all seems like the Pat Boone version, where Christ dies with clean hair and Hollywood celestial choirs on the soundtrack.

Jesus, or His relative absence, was notable in the performances. His name gets a workout in fundamentalist speech, in gospel and contemporary Christian music, but though God the Father was often invoked (this political season has been a bonanza for imams at the podium), the Son was scarce. Though Frank Breeden's Dove Awards connections were manifest and faith was an inescapable presence in the convention text (as Elizabeth Dole reminded us, "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom *from* religion"), a decision seems to have been made not to harp on the possibly divisive star of the New Testament on national TV. The other word left relatively unuttered was "Israel." As with the Democrats, nobody here wanted to deal with that nation's central role in our present military drama. The first strong mention I caught was in the closing invocation of a Hungarian death-camp survivor, thus putting Israel and its enemies comfortably in the context of Nazi atrocities. The reluctance of the Democrats to tackle our policy toward Israel (and our other considerable influences in Middle Eastern affairs) leaves the assertion that the 9/11 attacks came from some simple hatred of "our freedom" unchallenged. Yes, Western culture, our secular materialism, our relatively unfettered women, our sexual openness offends and threatens the ayatollahs of the world, but I don't think that puts suicide bombers into buses or planes. If we were a dictatorship with the same presence in the region, we'd still be the target of terrorists.

But pageants and ad campaigns are not made for critics. If the faithful are stirred, who cares if the organ was out of tune? If sales go up, why replace the annoyingly repetitive ad with something slick and clever? I used to try to watch *Hee Haw* because I like country music, and could never get past all the damn grinning and winking (what a relief for black musicians when they stopped having to smile every time they pulled their face out of their horn), but a lot of people tuned in every week. The buzz on the RNC's production is coursing through the political chant-and-rant shows, but the product doesn't hit the box office till November.

Though I thought billing Zell Miller as "the conscience of the Democratic Party" was brilliant. JOHN SAYLES

John Sayles is the director, most recently, of Silver City, *which opens nationwide September 17. Nation Books has just published* Silver City and Other Screenplays *and will publish, in October, Sayles's short story collection,* Dillinger in Hollywood.

RUDY MAKES HIS MOVE

Back in the fog of war in Vietnam, LBJ super suckup Jack Valenti let the world know how he felt. "I sleep each night a little better, a little more confidently, because Lyndon Johnson is my President," he intoned. "Fighting Jack," as Art Buchwald was quick to dub Valenti, was a tough act to follow, but since records are made to be broken, now comes Rudolph Giuliani. In prime time at the 2004 Republican National Convention in Madison Square Garden, the former New York City Mayor confessed to having burbled to his police commissioner Bernard Kerik: "Bernie, thank God George Bush is our President." That sweet nothing ought to give Rudy a chokehold on the Fighting Jack Valenti Memorial Cup for Stakhanovite Sycophancy. Later, Rudy in effect copped the cup when he anointed the POTUS as America's Churchill.

On MSNBC, a skeptical Chris Matthews grilled Giuliani about that Thank God George Bush mantra. But since Rudy stuck to his story, there might have been method to his out-of-character YesManShip. If so, keep a weather eye out for an October Surprise. As a potent come-on to Reagan Democrats in battleground states, the feckless Tom Ridge could be axed at Homeland Security in favor of the man people have come to know and love as "America's Mayor." Keep glued. NOEL E. PARMENTEL JR.

Noel E. Parmentel Jr. remains a Barry Goldwater/John McCain Republican.

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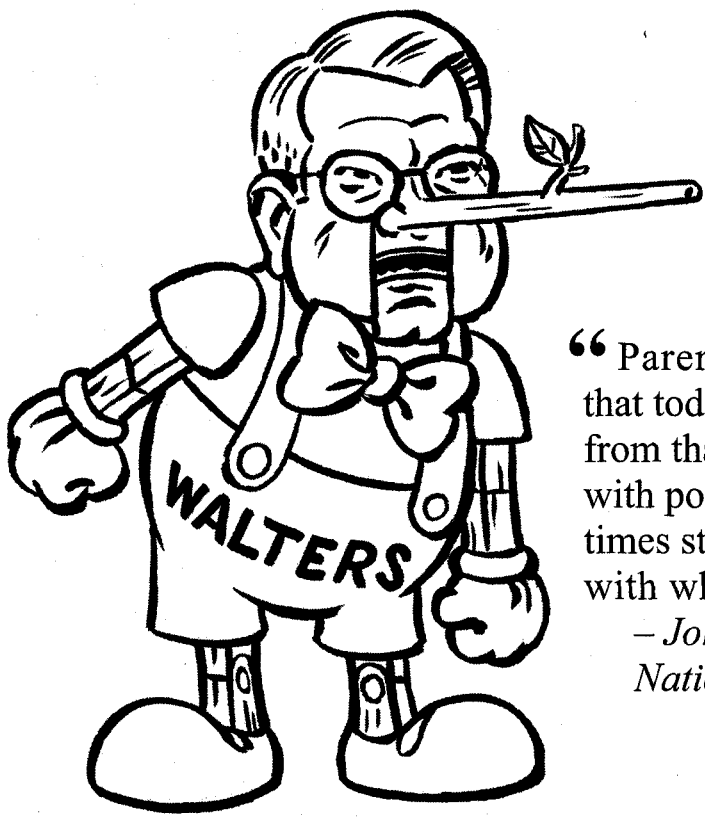

"Parents are often unaware that today's marijuana is different from that of a generation ago, with potency levels ten to twenty times stronger than the marijuana with which they were familiar."

– John Walters, Office of National Drug Control Policy

The European Union says it ain't so.

"Statements in the popular media that the potency of cannabis has increased by ten times or more in recent decades are not suported by the limited data that are available from either the USA or Europe. The greatest long-term changes in potency appear to have occurred in the USA. It should be noted here that before 1980 herbal cannabis potency in the USA was very low by European standards....

"The natural variation in the THC content between and within samples of herbal cannabis or cannabis resin at any one time and place far exceeds any long-term changes that may have occurred either in Europe or the USA."

– *Overview of Cannabis Potency, 2004*, European Union Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (Full report at www.csdp.org/research/insights6web.pdf)

Drug policy should be based on science, not politics.

CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org, Mike Gray, Chair; Robert Field, Co-Chair
DrugWarFacts.org, MedicalMJ.org, AddictInTheFamily.org

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JONATHAN SCHELL

The Grand Illusion

Every human being is interested in two kinds of worlds: the Primary, everyday world which he knows through his senses, and a Secondary world or worlds which he not only can create in his imagination, but which he cannot stop himself creating.

—*W.H. Auden,* Secondary Worlds

Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself.

—*Hannah Arendt,* The Origins of Totalitarianism

Auden had in mind the secondary worlds of literature, but as the Arendt quote indicates, his idea has wider application. Seen in his terms, the recent Republican convention was the political equivalent of a secondary world. Of course, the essential difference between a novel and the convention is that whereas a novel is built on the premise, shared by author and reader, that none of it claims to be true, the convention was offered as a full substitute for the primary world of reality. Seen in Arendt's terms, the convention was proto-totalitarian—an invitation to a still-free people not just to believe a few lies but to believe in what she calls a "lying world." The attraction and power of such a bid resides in its totality, as if someone had disaggregated the dots in a photograph, discarded half, added new ones and then reassembled them all into a compelling new photograph. In Arendt's words, such an effort requires "using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalizing them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by individual experience." Not just one fact or another but the factual world is discarded.

It's telling that the way to the convention was paved by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, a group whose mere title qualifies as a big lie, since its first ad, accusing John Kerry of lying to receive medals, itself contained brazen falsehoods, soon rebutted by all credible documentary evidence, eyewitness accounts and even some of the Swift Boaters' past testimony. But more disturbing than these falsehoods, which Bush refused to disavow, was the effect in public opinion polls, many of which put Bush in the lead for the first time in months. This big lie had knocked a candidate out of apparent front-runnership for the presidency of the United States. The public's appetite for political fiction had been powerfully demonstrated.

Then came the convention. For the unfaithful, watching it produced, as the Niagara of distortion poured out of the TV, a protracted, helpless, sputtering interior monologue of "buts": "But what about…" "But last year you said…" "But that's not true…"

In our world, and here at home, we will extend the frontiers of freedom. (George W. Bush)

Extend freedom at home? But what about the Patriot Act, allowing searches and seizures without notice; the suspension of habeas corpus for citizens named "enemy combatants" (and the Supreme Court's rejection of this claim); the detention and arrest of people who disagree with the President yet seek to attend his rallies? Which freedom has been strengthened by this Administration?

Extend freedom abroad? But what about the rebellion and intensifying repression in Iraq, the US embrace of dictators throughout Central Asia, its embrace of the authoritarian Putin regime in Russia? To exactly which countries has freedom been extended? How does the nosedive in respect for America in every region of the world fit in with a global US plan to promote freedom?

And we are working to advance liberty in the broader Middle East, because freedom will bring a future of hope and the peace we all want. And we will prevail.

But what about your "Greater Middle East Initiative," proposed this year, and dead on arrival?

We will provide low-income Americans with better access to healthcare.

But what about the 4 million people who lost their health insurance in your term and the record-breaking increase in Medicare premiums scheduled to be released the very day after your speech?

The biggest threat we face today is having nuclear weapons fall into the hands of terrorists.... The most important result thus far...is that the black-market network that supplied nuclear weapons technology to Libya, as well as to Iran and North Korea, has been shut down. (Dick Cheney)

But why don't you name the country—Pakistan—that was the center of that network and that was embraced for three years by the United States while the network was active?

Many of the greatest dangers to the United States and the world were so thoroughly suppressed at the convention that no cue was given even for a "what about" reaction: Global warming? No sign of it in the world according to the President. Osama bin Laden, the uncaught murderer of almost 3,000 people in New York? Down the memory hole. Record budget and trade deficits? Keeping company with Osama. Weapons of mass destruction in Iraq claimed as justification for the war? As little trace of that false assertion as of the weapons themselves.

What was offered, then, in the absence of recent facts? Mostly a gigantic historical analogy, which took the form, "Just as the United States expanded freedom by defeating Hitler, so now the United States will expand freedom by attacking…" and here we (and the President) are free to slot in an ever-changing cast of characters. In his vision, we are "the greatest nation on earth." Because we are great, "they," the "evildoers," hate us. Therefore, we must destroy them, bringing peace to the world. Missing is any awareness of our own weaknesses, failures or wrongdoing. Missing, too, is the memory of our words and, finally, the gift of our very senses, the primary world before our eyes. Seen from the elevation of the convention vision, how can mere facts—the torture at US bases around the word, the full-scale rebellion against our occupation of Iraq, the growing fear and horror at our actions around the world—

(Continued on Page 28)

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Swatting at Flies

Who would you rather have in your corner, Sasso or Baker? In its hour of need the Kerry campaign brings on board John Sasso, breathlessly described in one news story as "canny and ruthless," but mostly known to the world as one of the men who ran the Dukakis campaign in 1988, which was about as far from "canny and ruthless" as you can go. Meanwhile, the Bush crowd brings on former Secretary of State James Baker to handle negotiations for the presidential debates. Yes, Baker, the man who negotiated the theft of the election in Florida in 2000. If you hunted for words that best describe Baker, "canny and ruthless" would do nicely.

When historians come to dissect the Kerry campaign they will surely marvel at the rich platter of issues handed the Democratic candidate, which he has thrust from him with shudders of distaste and instead turned back, like Mencken's Bryan, to swat at flies.

Read the report of the 9/11 Commission, as Kerry and his "strategists" have surely done, and there are mounds of fragrant dung to hurl at Bush and Cheney: the warnings from the FBI and CIA ignored by the White House, the obvious lies about Cheney getting Bush's go-ahead to issue the shoot-down orders that never reached the Air Force pilots.

You'd think the Kerry campaign would have put together a group of 9/11 widows and, along the lines of the Swift Boat vets, had them trail Bush, denouncing him as the man who slept through the warnings of imminent attack by Al Qaeda. It's all there on the plate, but Kerry has spurned it; 9/11 is off the table.

Read the US Senate report on the manipulation of intelligence to concoct the bogus WMDs, used as the rationale for the Iraq invasion. It's replete with detailed stories of Cheney's eight visits to CIA HQ at Langley to browbeat the analysts, plus scores of kindred jimmying of the data. Kerry could have said he voted war-making powers to the President because he and his colleagues were served up lies.

But no, Kerry hops around on the issue all summer and then loses it at the Grand Canyon, saying that even knowing what he does now about the lack of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in Iraq, he still would have voted to authorize the war. This was after James Rubin told the *Washington Post* that "in all probability," Kerry would have launched a military attack to oust Saddam if he were President.

As a piece of tactical stupidity it's hard to beat. There on the plate in front of Kerry was probably the best-documented account of White House deception in living memory, and he thrust it away. Fake WMDs are off the table. In fact, the whole war is off the table, even as American dead top 1,000, as Kerry refines and redefines, shifts from foot to foot and says he would have done it all differently.

Spygate? The nation's secrets being filched by Bush's neocons, passed to Israel and Tehran? The only surprise here is that Kerry hasn't already called for charges to be dropped against any and all suspects, and urged the dismissal of FBI investigators on grounds of anti-Semitism.

In Afghanistan, America's man Karzai can drive around bits of Kabul in relative safety, the same way that America's man Allawi can display himself in a couple of acres of downtown Baghdad. Elsewhere the Taliban rules and Osama takes his noonday mountain hikes in the Hindu Kush. But for Kerry, Afghanistan is off the table.

Pretty much everything's off the table except for some Kerry rhetoric that no one believes about a health plan and taxing people who make more than $200,000. As Bush told the crowds in Ohio, the Kerry plan will never fly because everyone knows the rich don't pay taxes anyway. The Supreme Court? Kerry said in May he wouldn't hesitate to nominate an anti-choice Justice. On the heels of this crafty rallying cry to his core supporters, he made the disclaimer that he wouldn't want to have a Supreme Court that reversed *Roe v. Wade*.

At a quick count, off the agenda of debate this year are the role of the Federal Reserve; trade policy; economic redistribution; nuclear disarmament; reduction of the military budget and the allocation of military procurement; the role of the World Bank, IMF, WTO; crime, punishment and the prison explosion; the war on drugs; corporate welfare; forest policy; the destruction of small farmers and ranchers; Israel; Cuba; the corruption of the political system. The CIA is on the table but not in an encouraging way, since Kerry touts the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, which wants to go back to the era before the Church hearings of the mid-1970s. The Senate and House Democrats are now backing off opposition to Bush's nominee as CIA director, Representative Porter Goss, seemingly on a signal from the Kerry campaign.

So what have Kerry supporters and prospective supporters got to hang their hat on? Not much, which is why most of the ones I meet seem wan and out of sorts, reduced to mutterings about fascism's march. It may indeed be on the march, but there are no spirited vows from Kerry that he'll stand in its path. Just the other day, in a debate on NPR one of his "strategists" boasted that he'd drafted some of the Patriot Act's language.

Once there was a vibrant antiwar movement outside the Democratic Party, and therefore with some purchase on the candidates. Howard Dean took care of that, and the Democratic National Committee took care of Howard Dean. Now there's pro-war Kerry, with no aggressive antiwar movement to push him to the left. All's quiet on the Western front. The left is in a funk, spouting nonsensical scenarios about 9/11, abandoning all long-term issues. Meanwhile the Empire is out of money, the housing bubble due to burst in the not too distant future. Why talk about that? This election, reality is off the table. As someone said back in 1995, political campaigns are "the graveyard of real ideas and the birthplace of empty promises." This was Teresa Heinz in the *Utne Reader*, just before she married Kerry. My bet is on a very low turnout. ■

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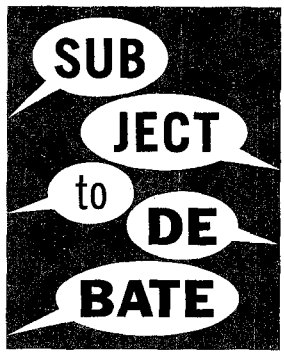
KATHA POLLITT

The Girlie Vote



Republicans are real men. Democrats are gay. Bush is a resolute he-man who will keep us safe from terrorists; Kerry is a flip-flopper who wants to take a more "sensitive" approach to the war on terror and who, as Vice President Cheney sneered, seems to think "Al Qaeda will be impressed with our softer side." Conservatives are not just tough, they're compassionate, too; as for the Christian right, what Christian right? Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain! That's really all you need to know about the Republican National Convention.

OK, so they overdid it a bit. Crazy Zell Miller had forgotten to take his meds, Cheney looked like he wanted to strangle a cat, and maybe you had to be there to see the humor in those anti-Kerry gag Band-Aids printed with a purple heart. Still, you've got to hand it to the Republicans: The macho card was skillfully played. They had John McCain, the coolest guy in Congress—the *only* cool guy in Congress—upon whom every male reporter in America seems to have a major crush. They had obnoxious Arnold Schwarzenegger, America's sweetheart. And don't forget Rudy Giuliani. His speech was such a masterful blend of brio, sentimentality and New York edge, by the end I was practically ready to vote for Bush myself.

Through clever stage-managing and endless iteration of the discredited Saddam/Al Qaeda connection, the RNC managed to attach to the reckless and inept Bush presidency the qualities Americans admire in men—optimism, confidence, fun, resolve, determination, single-mindedness, strength, will, foresight. Kerry and the Dems were the opposite—pessimistic, weak, indecisive, effeminate Breck girls and girlie men. You'd think Kerry, not Bush, had been the cheerleader in prep school. In the contest between real men and girlie men, women don't exist. The few female speakers were there to underline Bush's heterosexual credentials: Elizabeth Dole said Bush would protect us from gay marriage; Laura, Barbara and the twins testified to his Dadness. And don't forget Barney, the Scottish Terrier. Real men have dogs. Women—gays—Democrats—have cats.

You wouldn't think so, though, if you'd watched the militaristic extravaganza that was the Democratic convention: the Swift Boat band of brothers, the saluting candidate "reporting for duty." I cringed, I really did. It was such a blatant manipulation of imagery, so patronizing, such a kick in the teeth to the Democratic base. *¿Quién es más macho?* Maybe they could just wrestle—or better yet, take a leaf from Zell Miller and have a duel. At this rate, we won't have a woman President until the year 3000, and she'll have to be a five-star general.

And what of those women voters both parties are supposedly so eager to woo? Bush has done so little for women—and so much against them—that Laura had to reach all the way to Afghanistan to find some women whose lives have arguably been bettered by her husband. Kerry's positions on issues women care about are good, but you have to read about them on his website: He has yet to make a direct appeal for women's votes. Martha Burk, the witty and vigorous head of the National Council of Women's Organizations, tells me that during the primaries Kerry actually told a roomful of Women for Kerry that he didn't want to single out female voters because that would be "pandering" to a special interest ("It caused a collective gasp")—the very charge leveled at the Dems by the right-wing antifeminists of the Independent Women's Forum. Since when are women—51 percent of the population—a special interest? Kerry, after all, has no problem appealing directly to veterans, to hunters, to NASCAR fans. What are those if not special interests? Why is it OK to sidle up to gun-owners but not to talk about your support for battered women?

Women who vote favor Democrats by a large margin—11 percent more women went for Gore than for Bush. Politicized liberal women can read the tea leaves; they know, for example, that Kerry's pro-choice even if the word "abortion" was missing from his acceptance speech. The problem is the disengaged and disaffected women, especially single women, who say neither candidate speaks to their lives. Kerry needs to make the case; he needs to talk about the threat to legal abortion and access to birth control, because unless a woman is a repro-rights maven, she very likely thinks abortion will always be there—at least for herself. He needs to talk about pay equity, which polls consistently show is the number-one issue for women. With the wage gap between men and women actually widening—women made 75.5 cents on the male dollar in 2003, down from 76.6 in 2002—this issue is a campaign gift from God. Most minimum-wage earners are adult women—Kerry should be shouting from the rooftops for a living wage. Women rely disproportionately on Social Security, which Bush wants to privatize—another divine present for Kerry. Childcare is a great women's issue—why don't we hear more about Kerry's plans for it? And couldn't Kerry speak directly to single mothers, working women, working mothers—the large majority of women in this country—and acknowledge them as full participants in American life who deserve society's blessing and help? Appearances by his wealthy wife and high-fashion daughters don't say to ordinary single women, half of whom make $30,000 a year or less: Here's a candidate who understands what you go through.

Not to worry, promises Ann Lewis of Women for Kerry, "We'll have the best-organized get-out-the-vote drive for women ever." Lewis is enthusiastic about projects like Just Ask a Woman, a report about how American women fared under Bush and what they stand to gain under Kerry, and Take Five, in which each woman takes responsibility for getting five unregistered women to the polls. Lewis points out that Kerry talks about education and healthcare, big issues for women, all the time—the media just don't pick it up.

Why would they? What a candidate proposes to do in vital areas of government that affect women and kids—boring. Who looks more manly holding a rifle—now, *that's* a campaign issue.■

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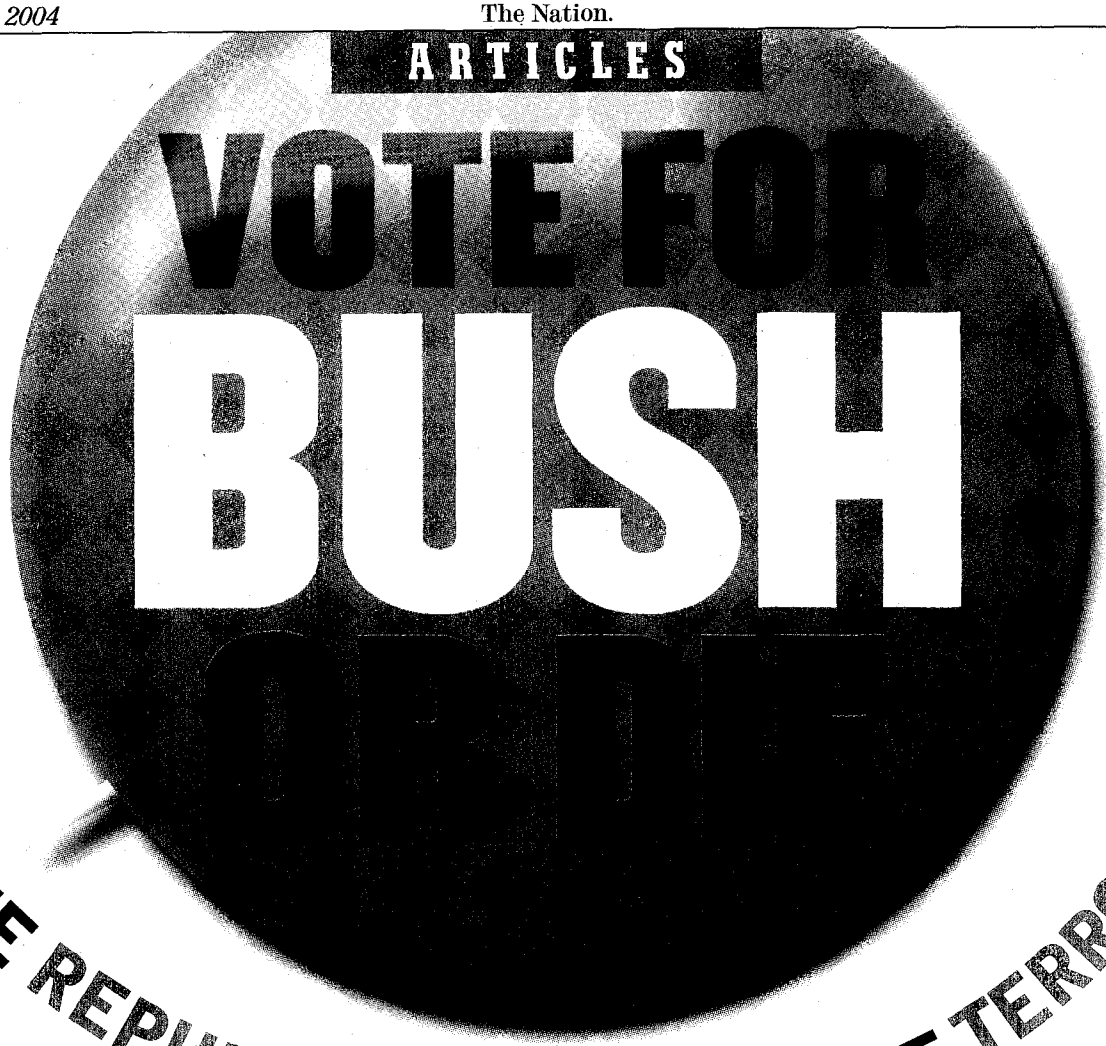

THE REPUBLICANS POLITICIZE TERROR

by
JUDD LEGUM and DAVID SIROTA

On August 11, John Kerry criticized the Bush Administration for blocking a bipartisan plan to give seniors access to lower-priced prescription drugs from Canada. With almost 80 percent of Medicare recipients supporting Kerry's position, the Bush campaign was faced with the prospect of defending a politically unpopular position.

That same day, in an interview with the Associated Press, FDA Acting Commissioner Lester Crawford said terrorist "cues from chatter" led him to believe Al Qaeda may try to attack Americans by contaminating imported prescription drugs. Crawford refused to provide any details to substantiate his claims.

Asked about Crawford's comments, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security was forced to concede, "We have no specific information now about any Al Qaeda threats to our food or drug supply." The Administration had brazenly used Americans' justifiable fears of a future terrorist attack to parry a routine criticism of its policies.

How did it come to this?

Crawford's comments were the latest iteration of a political strategy—hatched in the days after 9/11—that has spiraled out of control. What started as an effort to leverage early support for the President on national security issues has expanded into the politicization of our country's safety and security infrastructure. That process has damaged the credibility of the federal government and made all Americans less secure.

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Before we buy their shares, we want them to share our values.

We refused to invest in a retail giant because they sold rugs made by children.

We divested our position in a Silicon Valley company because of the increased volume of their Defense Department business.

We intentionally invest in community development banks that work in low-income minority areas.

What would you expect of us? We were founded during the Vietnam war by ministers who felt it was wrong to own a company that made napalm. From that day to this, our principal has followed our principles.

We now have four socially responsible funds. All have a low ($250) minimum initial investment.

You should consider a fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses carefully before investing. For a free prospectus that contains this and other important information please call or visit our web site. Read the prospectus carefully before investing.

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Revving the Engines

In the weeks following 9/11, President Bush's popularity—which was languishing at around 50 percent in August 2001—soared to 90 percent. By mid-October 2001, support for Republicans in Congress—which was at just 37 percent in August—had shot up thirty points. After Republicans lost most major 2001 gubernatorial races to Democrats, GOP strategists realized that the key to electoral success was tapping into the post-9/11 fear of terrorism and focusing on security issues.

On January 19, 2002—just nineteen weeks after the 9/11 attacks—Bush's top political adviser, Karl Rove, told a high-level gathering at the Republican National Committee to "go to the country" and tell the American people they can "trust the Republican Party to do a better job of...protecting America." Soon afterward, Bush authorized the Republican Party to sell photographs of himself aboard Air Force One, looking concerned and talking on a red telephone to the Vice President on 9/11.

As the 2002 midterm elections neared, White House political director Ken Mehlman developed a secret PowerPoint presentation—which was made public after being dropped in a park—urging Republican candidates to highlight fears of future terrorist attacks. In the most outrageous example, Georgia Senate candidate Saxby Chambliss, who had avoided service in Vietnam, ran campaign commercials drawing parallels between triple amputee Vietnam War veteran Max Cleland and Osama bin Laden.

President Bush reinforced these tactics by barnstorming the country—he made seventeen appearances in the last week of the campaign alone—emphasizing the threat posed by Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein and impugning the security credentials of Democrats. Campaigning in New Jersey in late September, Bush claimed Democrats in the Senate were "not interested in the security of the American people."

The strategy was successful, and on Election Day 2002, Republicans made significant gains in the House and Senate.

Getting Up to Speed

In January 2003, eager to repeat their success, the Republicans decided to hold their convention in New York City in late August and early September of 2004—the latest date a convention has ever been held. The move insured that Ground Zero would be their backdrop on the eve of the three-year anniversary of 9/11.

And it did not stop there. The Bush team's first political ads featured grisly images of firefighters carrying flag-draped coffins out of the rubble of the World Trade Center. But the spots backfired after firefighters and 9/11 victims' families accused the campaign of seeking to exploit the attacks for political gain.

Republicans were forced to adopt alternative tactics, this time through mythmaking. In the spring, Representative Tom Cole of Oklahoma told a group of Republicans that "if George Bush loses the election, Osama bin Laden wins the election." He was echoed by the right-wing media. One nationally syndicated columnist wrote, "Which candidate does our enemy want to lose? George W. Bush." Fox News pundit Monica Crowley similarly observed,

Judd Legum is deputy research director and David Sirota is director of strategic communications at the American Progress Action Fund.

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"America's adversaries want to see John Kerry elected." Later that month, Republican political operatives commissioned an "independent" poll that purported to find that "60 percent of registered voters believed that terrorists would support John Kerry in this year's presidential elections." The poll was so suspect that only the right-wing media reported it. But it helped advance the story.

By May, CNN Justice Department correspondent Kelli Arena "reported" that there was "some speculation that Al Qaeda believes it has a better chance of winning in Iraq if John Kerry is in the White House."

The Bush campaign, meanwhile, sought to bolster this speculation with a new barrage of campaign advertisements distorting Kerry's voting record on defense and intelligence issues. All this despite Bush's January 2002 promise that he had "no ambition whatsoever to use the war [on 'terrorism'] as a political issue."

But the images, partisan attacks and myths were not improving the President's poll numbers fast enough to counterbalance damage brought on by violence in Iraq and a sluggish economy. On May 16, a new Gallup poll showed the President's job-approval rating had fallen to 46 percent. Days later, as the Abu Ghraib prison scandal was taking its toll on the White House, the media uncovered new information suggesting that responsibility for the scandal reached to top Administration officials.

In short, more was needed.

Overdrive

This is when mounting evidence began to indicate that the timing and substance of the government's terror warnings were being driven, in part, by political considerations.

On May 26 Attorney General John Ashcroft held a dramatic press conference announcing that Al Qaeda was "almost ready to attack the United States" and had the "specific intention to hit the United States hard." But Ashcroft did not provide any new or specific information, the Homeland Security Department did not raise the terrorism threat alert level, and a senior Administration official told the *New York Times* that there was "no real new intelligence" to substantiate the warning.

In July, two days after Kerry selected John Edwards as his running mate, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge held a press conference of his own to say that "Al Qaeda is moving forward with its plans to carry out a large-scale attack in the United States." Again, he did not elaborate on what was new about his statement and was forced to admit, "We lack precise knowledge about time, place and method of attack."

That same month, *The New Republic* reported that top Pakistani security officials were being pressured by the Bush Administration to announce the capture of high-value terrorist targets during the Democratic National Convention. The White House responded with a standard denial, and the rest of the media ultimately brushed it off as an uncorroborated conspiracy theory.

But on July 29, just hours before Kerry's keynote address, Pakistan announced the capture of Al Qaeda suspect Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani. Curiously, he had been apprehended five days earlier. Even more suspect: The announcement was made at midnight Pakistani time, when most Pakistanis were asleep, but at the perfect time to coincide with America's prime-time television news schedule.

A few days later—during the period when attention to nominee Kerry would traditionally lead to a bounce in popularity—Ridge announced that he was raising the threat level in New York City, Northern New Jersey and the District of Columbia to "Code Orange." He claimed the threat level was being raised because of "new and unusually specific information about where Al Qaeda would like to attack." Undermining his claim that "we don't do politics in the Department of Homeland Security," he wove a campaign-style endorsement of the President into his warning: "We must understand that the kind of information available to us today is the result of the President's leadership in the war against terror," Ridge declared just a few breaths after invoking frightening images of "explosives," "weapons of mass destruction" and "biological pathogens."

But Ridge neglected to mention that most of the information was at least three years old, much of it surveillance data that had been collected before 9/11. Ridge also conceded that New York City—which was already at "Code Orange" before his announcement—would not raise its level of alert.

A week later the right-wing media did its best to deflect the embarrassment by once again dredging up the myth that a vote against Bush is a vote for terrorists. The conservative *Washington Times* ran a front-page story quoting Bush officials as saying that in the upcoming election, "the view of Al Qaeda is 'anybody but Bush.'" Again, they provided no proof to back up the claim.

Speaking to voters in Iowa on September 7, Cheney expressed what is now the very public message of the Bush campaign: "It's absolutely essential that eight weeks from today, on November 2, we make the right choice, because if we make the wrong choice then the danger is that we'll get hit again. And we'll be hit in a way that will be devastating." In other words, vote for us or you'll die.

The double talk and political opportunism by the Administration on these issues go beyond poor taste. By sending conflicting messages to the public, Administration officials create confusion about what actually poses a threat. Beyond that, each unnecessary warning produces "threat fatigue"—the tendency to ignore warnings when they are repeated—in the American public. That means Americans will become less receptive to truly urgent terrorism warnings when they arise. And if recent polling is any indication, this erosion in public confidence is already occurring. A new survey by Columbia University found that 59 percent of those polled would not evacuate their town immediately if directed to do so by the government.

This is not to imply that the threat of terrorism isn't real. There is no reason to doubt the staff statement of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission that Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations are "actively striving to attack the United States and inflict mass casualties." That means the government has a solemn obligation to do whatever is required to protect the American people from this threat.

But there are now justifiable doubts about what is actually dictating our government's actions. Today critical decisions appear to be guided by political operatives instead of terrorism experts. And in the long run, that has weakened national security—the very issue Republicans want so desperately to call their own. ■

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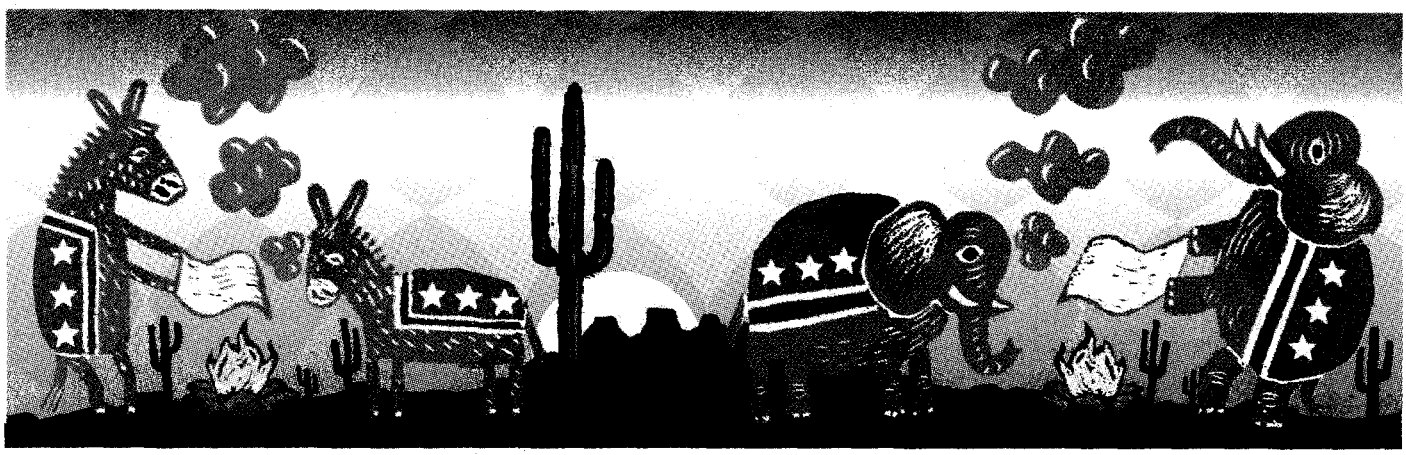
ONCE GOLDWATER TERRITORY, IT NOW BOASTS LARGE NUMBERS OF INDEPENDENTS AND LATINOS. DEMOCRATS HOPE THE CHANGES WILL TRANSLATE INTO A WIN IN NOVEMBER.



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Arizona: Turning Blue for Kerry?

MARC COOPER

There aren't just "swing states" in this election, but "swing constituencies," too. This is the first in a series that looks at examples of both that have implications for progressive politics. —The Editors

Flagstaff, Arizona

Except for an occasional candidate's gaffe, it's usually difficult to find anything memorable about the tightly scripted, closely choreographed, staged-for-television presidential campaign trail events. But as John Kerry's train nears the local station in this picturesque mountain town on a late Sunday night in August ten days after the Democratic convention, just about everyone around me seems to agree that something remarkable is happening. Five hours ago, long before we heard the train's steam whistle signaling the candidate's arrival in the same car Harry Truman used in 1948, thousands of people had already filled the town plaza. (Police eventually estimate the crowd at a minimum of 10,000—a startling number for a city of only 61,000.)

When Kerry finally arrives, well past 10 PM, almost two hours late, dressed in signature khakis, open blue shirt and a black blazer, he apologizes to the crowd for the delay. He says he had to make an unscheduled stop in the tiny town of Winslow because an impromptu crowd of 1,000 or more had assembled at the station. "I saw this sign," he explains. "It said GIVE US TEN MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU EIGHT YEARS. I took it. They deserve to have a stop!"

The crowd roars its approval. Then, until nearly midnight, it weathers the cold mountain night to hear out not only Kerry but a plethora of other Democratic elected officials, including Governor Janet Napolitano, who elicits another roar of approval when she vows, "We're gonna turn Arizona blue!"

The crowd is thick with KERRY FOR PRESIDENT T-shirts and banners. That may be a reflection in part of the fact that local Northern Arizona University is a magnet for Democrats. There's also a strong contingent of Navajos, who have come in from their nearby reservation. Even a smattering of union T-shirts are visible. "I drove five hours to come here tonight," says 42-year-old Luis Peralta, wearing a MINERS FOR KERRY shirt. "His coming to Arizona is so important to us. I'm going to take the next month off to volunteer. We can put him over the line."

All the excitement derives from much more than Kerry's tortuously dry oratory—no better in person than on the screen. Rather, Arizonans of both parties, but especially Democrats, know that for the first time they can remember, their state has become a key player in a presidential election. Maybe *the* decisive player. Not a single presidential candidate campaigned in Flagstaff in 2000, but both the Kerry and Bush campaigns have been divebombing in and out of this state of 5.6 million for the past few months. Kerry's visit to this northern Arizona town is the first ever by a Democratic presidential nominee.

Indeed, for all the talk about Rust Belt battleground states like Ohio, the collective electoral clout of New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado and Arizona could easily overshadow any larger heartland state. Nevada, a red state last time around, is now an even match, as is New Mexico, where Al Gore won by 366 votes in 2000. Democrats are also confident they can compete in Colorado, where Bush beat Gore by eight points.

But it's in Arizona, the second-fastest-growing state (after Nevada), brimming with Latinos and Independents—it now has ten electoral votes—where the bloodiest fight is likely to take

Marc Cooper, a Nation *contributing editor, is a senior fellow at USC's Annenberg Institute for Justice and Journalism.*

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RETRO vs. METRO

RED

- The South, the Great Plains, the Mountain West and Appalachia
- 35% of the population & 50 Senators
- Subsidized extraction industries agriculture, oil, gas, coal and forestry- and majority of military installations
- Pays 29% of federal taxes
- From 1991 to 2001, received $800 billion more in goods, services and cash from Washington than it paid in taxes
- Tom DeLay, Mel Gibson, Bill O'Reilly, Extreme Makeover, Lee Greenwood, Pat Buchanan, George Bush
- The Bible is the literal word of God: Yes 60%
- Nobel Laureates in science and economics: 23

BLUE

- The Northeast coast, the West Coast and the Great Lake States
- 65% of the population & 50 Senators
- Non-subsidized manufacturing, financial services and information industries
- Pays 71% of federal taxes
- From 1991 to 2001, paid $1.4 trillion more in taxes than it got back in goods, services and cash
- Barack Obama, Michael Moore, the West Wing, Al Franken, Bill Moyers, Dixie Chicks, John Kerry
- The Bible is the literal word of God: Yes 44%
- Nobel Laureates in science and economics: 235

This message is from *The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro America* an important new book that deepens our understanding of America as a polarized nation and provides a roadmap for how the Democrats can become an effective majority party.

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place. Democrats, who lost the state by six points in 2000, have been pouring in resources—dwarfing the meager commitment made in 2000. Political spots saturate the airwaves—in both English and Spanish (Latinos are a fourth of the population). The AFL-CIO has deemed Arizona crucial enough to be one of the states to which it will send election monitors to guarantee minority voting rights. Left-of-center nonprofits and 527s—from the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, to New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson's Moving America Forward, to the labor- and church-supported New American Freedom Summer—have also set up shop. Volunteers man phone-banks every night—and day.

"I had no idea what it meant until now to be a target state," says Debbie Lopez, a recent executive director of the Arizona Democratic Party, with a laugh. From cramped quarters inside the Phoenix offices of ACORN, buried in whiteboards, stacked-up file folders and Excel spreadsheets, Lopez now runs the $3 million Latino Vote Project, which has registered 65,000 people since January. "What a difference money and attention bring," she says. "Four years ago the Democratic coordinated campaign budget in Arizona was $800,000. In 2002 it was $9 million. This year will be $10 million. Plus another $11 million or $12 million from 527s. All together, that's twenty times bigger than four years ago."

And Democrats have the highest expectations regarding a return on their investment. "This is not your grandfather's Old West," says Kerry campaign state director Doug Wilson. "What was once a knee-jerk Republican state is going through enormous changes. Goldwater has been replaced by McCain. Ideology has been replaced by Independents. And on election night you're going to see we're going to win this state and elsewhere in the West. Not a big victory. But enough of a wind from the West to sweep the nation."

'This is not your grandfather's Old West.... Ideology has been replaced by Independents.' —Doug Wilson, Kerry campaign state director

Until very recently, anyone making that sort of grandiose prediction would have been immediately diagnosed as a sunstroke victim. As Wilson notes, these hardscrabble desert climes incubated Barry Goldwater and, in turn, the modern conservative movement. At one point, Arizona turned so far to the right that local Republicans suggested taking Goldwater's name off the party headquarters because, in his waning years, he was too soft on gay and abortion rights. In the late 1980s Governor Evan Mecham (who was eventually impeached and removed from office for corruption) issued an order repealing MLK's birthday as a state holiday. Arizona Democrats lost eleven straight presidential elections from 1952 through 1992, never topping 40 percent of the statewide vote. And while Doug Wilson engineered a Clinton victory in '96, it was only to see Bush win in 2000.

But with torrential population growth through the 1980s and '90s, more than doubling the state's size, Arizona voters have become more urban, more moderate and mostly more Independent, the latter now making up 23 percent of the electorate. Republicans still outnumber Democrats in registration, but in 1996 Arizona voters approved the use of medical marijuana. Two years later Arizona became one of only four states to approve comprehensive "clean money" campaign finance reform. In 2002 a Democratic push fueled by the state's twenty-one Native American tribes and supported by a growing Latino vote elected Janet Napolitano to the Statehouse. Both the state attorney general's office and the mayoralty of Phoenix—the seat of Republican stronghold Maricopa County—have recently been taken by Democrats. Cooperation from moderate Republicans also allowed legislative approval this year of Governor Napolitano's reform budget. And now, by anybody's account, Arizona is up for grabs.

You could learn all you need to know about Arizona's shifting demographics and its resulting political alignment from glancing at the story lineup on one recent front page of the *Arizona Republic*. "End of the Trail" read an above-the-fold feature headline. The Old West theme park Rawhide, on the northern edge of Phoenix, was closing after thirty-three years, a victim of "the dusty fallout of suburban development and soaring land prices." Next to that article was one showing Bush leading Kerry by a slim three points, a statistical dead heat. "It's changed demographics that will let us win, a new coalition," says Wilson. "This year the Latino vote is going to be very important, but it's only one factor among four or five. Native Americans are another. An increase in turnout of our base is another, and our base is more left, more progressive. Independents are another factor, and they are increasingly difficult to classify. And then there are disaffected Republicans, especially moderate women."

In a nondescript, one-room office in gritty south-central Phoenix, Kerry staff organizer Arnulfo De La Cruz is just setting up his war room and covering the walls with annotated precinct maps of the three legislative districts that are his territory. There are 67,000 registered voters in his purview. They are predominantly Latino, but turnout in these working-class districts runs 15–20 percent below the state average of 70 percent.

Back in the run-up to the February primary, the Kerry campaign was already fervently working this ground. I accompanied former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros, former California Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa and Phoenix Congressman Ed Pastor one morning as they canvassed door to door for Kerry in the immediate aftermath of his Iowa upset victory. Now De La Cruz is going to pull on those same sleeves with a decidedly pro-Latino pitch. "When I talk to my neighborhood leaders I stress how under a Bush Administration Latino unemployment is at more than 7 percent, how the gap between Latino and Anglo home ownership has widened, how one out of two Latinos won't graduate from high school and the Bush Administration has cut support programs, and how 38 percent of Latinos have no healthcare," he says. "That's the message that resonates here."

But that's enough to win, says Lopez of the Latino Vote Project. "Believe it or not, this is really the first time any serious attention is being paid to registering Latinos," she says. Of the some 700,000 eligible Latino voters in the state, only half are registered. "And half of them won't vote," Lopez predicts. That's why, she says, moving 10,000–15,000 voters here or there into balloting could make a huge difference. "Democratic turnout is usually about 10 percent less than Republican," she says, "so you have to peel off some of that Republican vote. And the Democrats have

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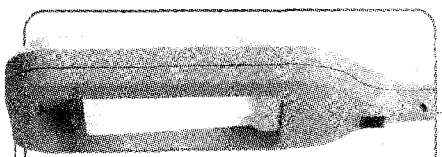

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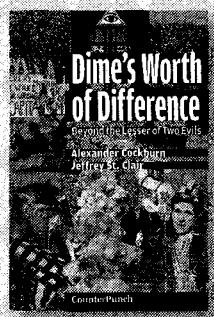

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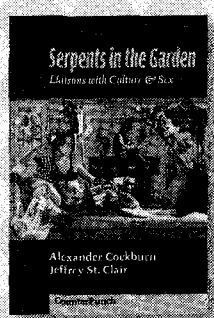

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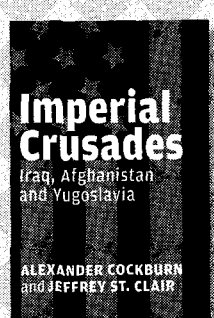

Imperial Crusades chronicles the lies that came back to haunt the liars in Washington and London, the secret agendas and the under-reported carnages of these wars. It is a ripely vivid and blow-by-blow commentary in the tradition of Tacitus, Macaulay and John Reed. We were right. They were wrong and this book proves the case. *Published by Verso*

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to get 65 percent of the Independent vote, just no way around that."

That evening, during a visit to one of the Kerry campaign phone banks in Phoenix, the feverish focus on that all-important Independent vote is immediately palpable. A retired immigration judge from Utah who has relocated here to work as a volunteer has got the script down perfect—as do the other half-dozen or so volunteers. "I'm calling from a presidential poll," he says to each person he calls off a voter list made up of only registered Independents. "If the election were today, who would you vote for: George W. Bush or John Kerry?" If the respondent answers "Bush," he thanks the person and hangs up. If the answer is "Kerry" or leaning toward Kerry, he says, "Great. So am I. I'm volunteering for the Kerry campaign and want to know if you could also help us out." Every time there's an affirmative answer, the volunteers ring a bell to spur one another on.

In Arizona, as elsewhere, the Kerry campaign charges up dead center, focusing on themes of "security"—national security and economic security—and de-emphasizing the more thorny issues of war and peace. But two hours south of the state capital in Tucson, decidedly more Democratic territory than Phoenix, fiery US Congressman Raul Grijalva, who originally supported Howard Dean, warns that "we cannot sanitize the message too much at the risk of losing our core people. Persuading the Independents and so on, well, that's the job of Kerry's general campaign. Our job down here is to turn out the base—a very progressive base."

The Republicans, meanwhile, are not about to quietly cede the state to the Democrats. Campaign appearances by both Bush and Cheney have brought out big and enthusiastic crowds, if not quite as large as Kerry's, and the Republicans also benefit from a more mature and better-oiled statewide organization. Republicans not only retain the upper hand in rural and ranching areas but also draw support from some of the newly arrived suburban high-tech transplants. Among the state's large veteran and retired population they can also fight the Democrats *mano a mano*.

Nor is the GOP ceding the Latino vote. Republicans claim 23,000 volunteers in Arizona. "Fifteen percent of those are Latinos," says GOP campaign consultant Rubén Alvarez. Stressing, as Democrats agree, that Latinos are not a homogeneous voting bloc, Alvarez says he's "confident" that Bush can take the plus-35 percent of the Latino vote he needs to win "because here in Arizona we have a big increase in Latino small businessmen who agree not only with the President's economic policies but also with his stand for traditional family values." Bush will also attract the Latino vote, Alvarez says, because "after eight years of no discussion at all, the President has elevated the debate on immigration."

But if there's one unpredictable wild card in the coming Arizona electoral shootout, it is, precisely, the issue of illegal immigration, as manifested in a Prop 187–like anti-immigrant measure on the November ballot. Ever since 1994, when the Clinton Administration began clamping down on the western and eastern extremes of the southern border, prompting desperate crossings through the brutal Arizona desert, this state has become the epicenter of the illegal immigration crisis. Thousands of undocumented migrants stream into Arizona on a daily basis. While thousands are apprehended, and some die in the crossing, equal numbers get through, swamping health and other state services.

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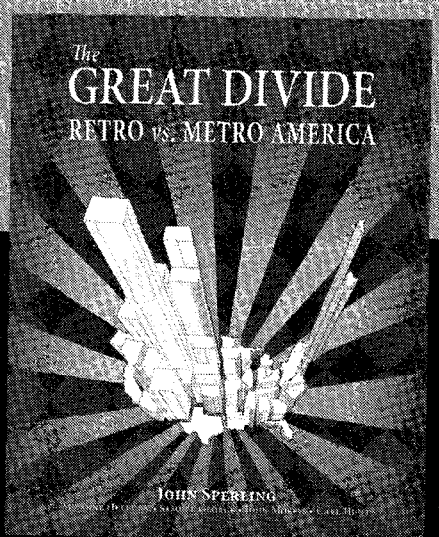

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Retro vs. Metro America

BY JOHN SPERLING WITH SUZANNE HELBURN, SAMUEL GEORGE, CARL HUNT AND JOHN MORRIS

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Reaction to the crisis has been mixed. Republican Senator John McCain has joined with Democrats to propose a legalization process—a measure spurned by the GOP Congressional leadership. On the ground level, numerous citizen and church groups run active relief programs, while xenophobic, rancher-based "militias" attempt to stop illegal crossings. The ballot measure, sponsored by a group called Protect Arizona Now (PAN), would require Arizonans to show proof of residence or citizenship when using public agencies. The Arizona Republican Party, fully cognizant that a Latino backlash against California's Prop 187 nearly wiped out that state's GOP, opposes the measure. But the Democrats, aware that some 40 percent of Latinos support it, won't take an official position against it. While he was in Arizona, Kerry punted on the issue, saying it's the sort of decision he would leave to the states. Says one Democratic consultant, "Lots of Mexican-Americans were either born here or say, 'Hey, I earned my stay here. So the next guy who comes along also has to. No free rides.'" No one is willing to guess which segment of the electorate will be most energized by the PAN initiative.

One possible silver lining for Democrats, however, could emerge from the immigration storm: a "spoiler" problem for Bush. Numerous Arizona conservatives were outraged when the President announced earlier this year that he would push for a guest-worker legalization program. Though the White House has, at least for now, scuttled the initiative, nativist resentment still simmers against Bush along the southern border. Some anti-immigration activists have started an Internet campaign, gathering pledges from angry conservatives that instead of voting for Bush in November they will write in the name of Colorado Representative Tommy Tancredo, a border crackdown advocate. As of August, a leading anti-immigration group claimed to have more than 30,000 pledges—most of them from Arizona.

The final uncertain twist in Arizona is the mail-in ballot. With voting allowed as early as September 30, young Democratic canvassers are relentlessly working their precinct lists, trying to sew up pledges to vote for Kerry. Their preferred tool is the voting-by-mail program. "And after what happened in Florida in 2000, people here are really going to use that mail-in ballot," says Mario Diaz, a Kerry consultant who ran the nominee's victorious Arizona primary campaign. The final Bush-Kerry debate is scheduled to take place on October 13 at Arizona State University, in the Phoenix suburb of Tempe. "The debate will coincide with a peak in voting by mail," Diaz says. "And the entire state will be watching every word." ■

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Be Our Guests

DAVID BACON

Julio Cesar Guerrero came north from Mexico in the spring of 2001 as a temporary contract worker. Recruited by Manpower of the Americas, he was sent to North Carolina, where he began working on the tobacco farm of Anthony Smith. After a few weeks, his fingers started to hurt, and then, one by one, his fingernails began falling off. Although Smith told him he couldn't see a doctor, he went anyway. The doctor said his problem was possibly caused by working without gloves in fields sprayed with pesticides. So Guerrero, who was employed through the H2-A federal guest worker program, called Legal Aid of North Carolina. But Smith warned him not to talk with legal workers.

Guerrero returned to Mexico at the end of the season. The next year, when he tried to get another job, he found his name on a blacklist maintained by MOA and the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA). Legal Aid protested, and as a result, Guerrero was sent to the United States again. That year, he worked for grower Rodney Jackson, who kept the workers' drinking water on a moving truck in the fields, forcing them to run after it with their mouths under the spigot. When Guerrero filed a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Jackson gave a warning notice and asked him to sign it. When Guerrero refused, Jackson fired him. A foreman took him to the bus station, telling him to go back to Mexico. Again Legal Aid intervened and got him assigned to another grower. Soon a growers' association representative gave Guerrero another warning notice, which he again refused to sign.

When the 2003 season began, Guerrero tried once more to sign up with MOA, but the recruiter told him that he'd already been given a second chance. Since he'd continued to make complaints, his name stayed on the blacklist.

Guerrero had had enough. In 2004 he became a plaintiff in a racketeering suit filed on April 13 in Wake County Superior Court, by Legal Aid of North Carolina, charging the NCGA with maintaining an illegal blacklist.

While Guerrero's case winds its way through the courts, proposals for setting up new temporary contract-worker programs, in industries far beyond agriculture, are proliferating. In fact, such schemes are part of most immigration reform proposals introduced into Congress this year. Their defenders argue that increasing labor protections can put a stop

David Bacon, who writes frequently for The Nation *on labor issues, is the author of* The Children of NAFTA *(California).*

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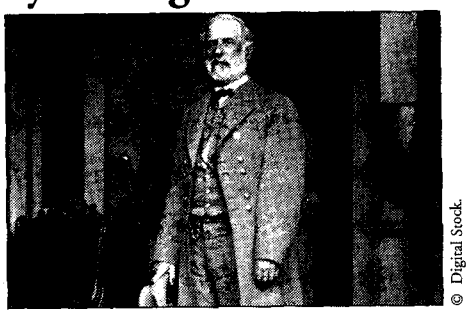

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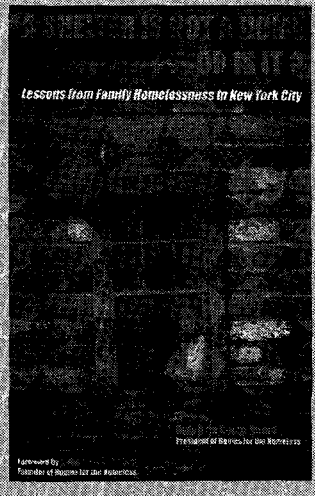

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to abuses, while insuring that employers get the labor they want. However, Guerrero's experience, and that of thousands of workers like him, raises serious doubts that these programs can effectively safeguard workers' rights.

Andrew McGuffin, staff attorney for Legal Aid of North Carolina, cautions, "the problem isn't that we don't have worker protection laws. It's that with guest workers they're not enforced, and when workers try to use these laws, they're blacklisted."

The growers, through NCGA, and Legal Aid have been squaring off for years. The growers' handbook warns workers not to talk to Legal Aid staff, calling them "enemies of the H2-A program" who are "trying to eliminate your job." The handbook also warns workers that any effort to "deliberately restrict production" or to "work slowly" will result in discipline or termination. Strikes or slowdowns are prohibited.

Last September a foreman for grower Chester Pilson informed guest worker Juan Villarreal Abundiz that there was no more work for him because he'd talked with Legal Aid, and an NCGA rep told him he'd probably be denied a job the following season. Villarreal was brought to the association office in Vass, North Carolina—a huge barn with a balcony along one side. As 200 workers gathered below, a foreman named Santos and an NCGA employee addressed them from the balcony, instructing them to take Legal Aid's pink "know your rights" booklets out of their luggage and throw them in a trash can in the middle of the floor. According to Villarreal, NCGA head Stan Eury and his assistants gave him a paper he couldn't read and told him if he didn't sign it, he'd have to pay his own bus fare back to Mexico. Villarreal signed.

The blacklist is not secret. The handbook calls it a "record of eligibility [that] contains a list of workers, who because of violations of their contract, have been suspended from the program." Although the handbook says no one will be disciplined for reporting violations of their rights, in fact that happens all the time.

The US Department of Labor, which certifies employers for the H2-A program, has never taken action to end the practice. Bush's first DoL Solicitor General, who would have had to support such action, was former unionbusting lawyer Eugene Scalia (son of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia). He was replaced in May 2003 by Howard Radzely, another management-side lawyer and a former Scalia clerk.

The 1997 list, called the "1997 NCGA Ineligible for Rehire Report," consists of 1,709 names. The reason for ineligibility is most often listed as abandoning a job or voluntary resignation. Legal Aid charges that when workers are fired for complaining, they're given a paper to sign saying they quit voluntarily. Among the hundreds of names are also many whose reason for ineligibility is given as "mother sick," "death in the family," "lazy," "slow," "work hours too long," "work too hot and hard" or "slowing up other workers." In 2003 the list for just one Mexican state, Durango, had 517 names.

Abuse of the H2-A program isn't limited to North Carolina. The most spectacular suppression of guest workers' rights came on November 21, 1986, when Caribbean cane cutters stopped work on the Fanjul family sugar plantation in south Florida. When the Fanjuls tried to pay a rate lower than what the workers considered fair, 384 cutters refused to leave their labor camp. The company called in the cops, who used guns, batons

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and dogs to force workers onto buses, some in their underwear. They were taken to Miami and repatriated.

Workers called it the "dog war." Nine years later, Okeelanta Corp., owned by the Fanjuls, agreed to pay 355 people $1,000 each to compensate them for lost belongings, and up to $20,000 to Florida Rural Legal Services. Although the claim for lost wages was dismissed by the US district court, the Labor Department eventually fined the Fanjuls for shorting workers' hours and underpaying wages.

In the 1990s Okeelanta was sued for cheating guest workers out of $14 million because it paid $3.70 a ton instead of $5.30 from 1987 to 1991. But the jury found for the Fanjuls instead of the workers, a decision upheld on appeal. Rob Williams, director of the Migrant Farm Worker Justice Project of Florida Rural Legal Services, told the *Palm Beach Post* that "the lasting lesson of all this is that our government will not voluntarily protect the rights of guest workers."

Guest workers in Canada, who work under a program like H2-A, have had similar experiences. On April 25, 2001, Mexicans laboring in Mastron Enterprises' tomato greenhouses in Leamington, Ontario, stopped work over complaints of abuse by a foreman. The day following the protest, about twenty-four were repatriated.

Other workers told representatives of the United Farm Workers that they had been working twelve-hour days, six and a half days a week, without overtime pay, for $7 an hour. "What I've realized here in Canada is that employers don't hire us as human beings," one worker told the UFW. "They think we're animals. The first threat that they always make is that if you don't like it, you can go back to Mexico." Chris Ramsaroop of Justicia for Migrant Workers observes, "To change their situation migrants must be guaranteed the right to form unions, the right to social and economic mobility in Canada, and most important, the right to regularization: Workers must have the right to apply for citizenship in Canada."

If Canadian guest workers can't get rights like these, in a country where labor rights are more vigilantly enforced, how likely is it that US guest workers will fare better?

According to the AFL-CIO, workers are routinely fired in 31 percent of all US union organizing drives. Most then face, in addition, disqualification from unemployment benefits as a result of the bogus claims that accompany such terminations. For guest workers, however, just being without a job violates the conditions for their visas, and makes them subject to immediate deportation.

In addition, they're strangers. It's much more difficult for them to find support from unions, legal aid workers or other community institutions. Jorge, a guest worker from Huehuetenango in Guatemala (who didn't want his real name used for fear of the blacklist), explained that when he was cheated on his wages "we didn't protest because we couldn't. We were far away from the company office," he said, "and maybe the next year they wouldn't give us the chance to go [to the US again]."

For Fernando Rodriguez Aguilar, even getting help from a priest was forbidden. Rodriguez was brought to North Carolina in 2002 to work for tobacco grower Jeffrey Lee in rural Johnston County. When he saw the crew leader selling alcoholic beverages in the fields, and cutting the hours of workers who wouldn't buy them, he complained to Father Tony Rojas. Then NCGA representative Jose Luis told him he shouldn't go to Father Tony's

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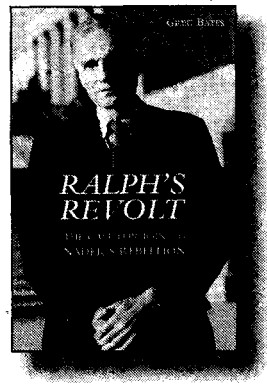

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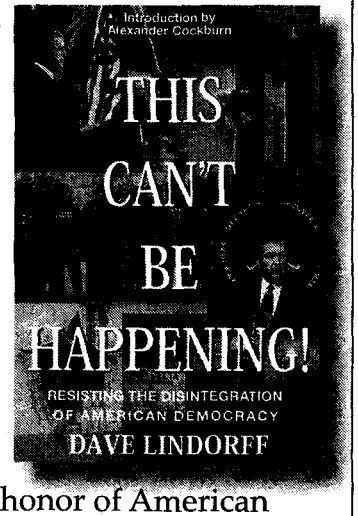

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church. "If you keep going, you'll have problems," he threatened. Sure enough, the following season, MOA put Rodriguez on the blacklist.

John Wilhelm, president of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, who also heads the AFL-CIO's immigration committee, says, "I don't think it's possible to have labor protections for contract workers." Pointing to the fact that even workers who are US citizens lose their jobs during union organizing campaigns, he says, "To think the law will protect people whose right to stay in the country ends with their job is not living in the real world."

Often the most important factor for workers, however, is the situation they face at home, in the communities from which they come. "More than the law, it's the dynamics of the [guest worker] program in developing countries that's the problem," says Mary Lee Hall, from North Carolina Legal Aid.

That problem is debt.

In the tiny towns of La Democracia and La Libertad, in northern Guatemala next to the Chiapas border, small-scale coffee farmers are sent every year to US pine forests, where they work as H2-B guest workers, planting and tending trees that will eventually be ground to pulp for the Southeast's huge paper mills. In 2001 Silvano Villatoro, a recruiter in La Democracia, offered Cecilio Domingo a job, for which he charged him 10,000 quetzales (about $1,200). Domingo's wife, Natividad Maldonado, remembers that her husband "borrowed the money, hugged our children, and left." They signed over the deeds to their two plots of land to the local moneylender, who charged 12 percent interest. Maldonado was left with no money. "Because we are so poor, I took my son, who is 12, and we went to cut coffee."

In guest-worker programs, 'people are treated neither as guests nor as workers, but as slaves for rent.' —Andrew McGuffin, Legal Aid attorney

After working eight months in the United States, Domingo was traveling through the Maine woods in a van that tumbled off a bridge into the Allagash River. He and thirteen other guest workers were drowned. Fortunately, he'd sent enough money home by that time for his wife to pay most of the debt.

The sole survivor of the Maine accident, Edilberto Morales-Luis, had accumulated a huge debt of 30,000 quetzales by the time he began working in the United States. Debts this large are impossible to pay off by working in Guatemala, where wages on a coffee plantation are 25 quetzales a day. "That isn't enough to support your family," says Virgilio Maldonado, another guest worker. "That is barely enough to eat." Only work in the United States enables someone to pay the debt and keep their home and land. And of course the dream is always that by continuing to work, a family can add a room on a house, or buy more land and fertilizer for bigger coffee harvests. But to return year after year, workers must stay on the good side of the recruiters.

Recruitment for the H2-B program has made Silvano Villatoro a wealthy coffee planter. During Guatemala's bloody counterinsurgency war he belonged to the paramilitary Civil Defense force in La Democracia, which aided the army. Today he has become a power in town. Villatoro doesn't need a formal blacklist—"I interview each person individually," he says. He doesn't take teachers or students.

Villatoro recruited the workers who died in the Maine accident for Evergreen Forestry Services, a company fined many times for wage and hour violations. Despite these violations, Evergreen was certified by the Employment Training Administration (part of the Labor Department) every year to import H2-B workers. Paper companies who hire Evergreen and recruiters like them say they're not responsible for labor violations, a position with which courts have agreed. And when it looked like Evergreen could be on the hook for huge damages because of the Maine accident, it suddenly stopped answering its phone in Sandpoint, Idaho. "The company I represented for six years no longer exists," Villatoro said.

Guest workers are not the only migrants vulnerable to economic pressure. It can be as perilous to lose a job as an undocumented worker as it is to lose one as a guest worker. In fact, the debt accumulated by paying a smuggler to go from La Democracia to the United States is even higher—about $6,000.

But for almost anyone living in La Democracia, or the thousand Guatemalan and Mexican towns sending people to the United States, these are the two choices.

In Oaxaca, a Mexican state to the north, Juan Romualdo Gutierrez Cortez heads the Binational Indigenous Oaxacan Front. The Frente organizes those left behind in the small towns that send migrants north. "Migration is a necessity, not a choice—there is no work here," he says. Gutierrez is a teacher: "You can't tell a child to study to be a doctor if there is no work for doctors in Mexico," he explains. "Children learn by example. If a student sees his older brother migrate to the United States, build a house and buy a car, he will follow that American dream."

Gutierrez and his compatriots recognize the dual nature of this imperative. "The million migrants from Oaxaca have reactivated the economy of many communities," he said. "Migration helps pacify people. Poverty is a ticking time bomb, and as long as there is money coming in from the United States, then there is peace. To curb migration our country has to have a better employment plan. We must push our government to think about the working class." Rick Mines, who directs the California Institute for Rural Studies, points out that migrant communities fared much better when whole families were able to migrate and settle in the United States. "Labor unionization, civic participation and wage levels all improved, as settled immigrants demanded better conditions," he said. "Families are better at protecting their rights than single men. Wives and mothers frequently become involved in US institutions and learn about their rights, helping to mobilize workers to stand their ground against unscrupulous employers."

So far, however, proposals for immigration reform are crafted more to meet business interests than the need for stable communities and families. The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which includes thirty-four major industry associations, has been particularly effective in lobbying for guest workers for the past six years. The Bush reform, unveiled in January, basically embodies their program. It would allow employers to use a new, three-year

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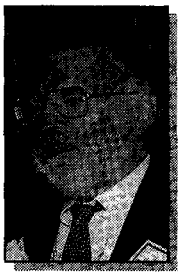

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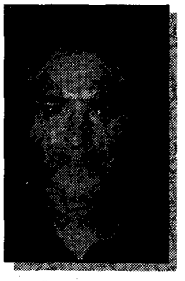

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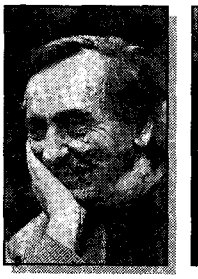

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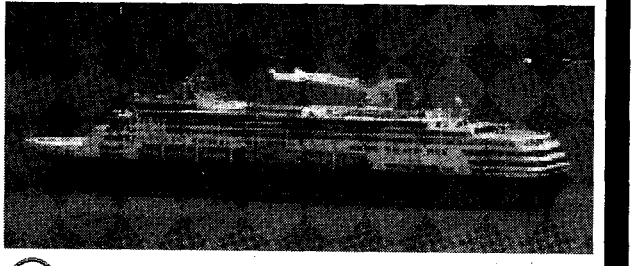

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temporary-worker category to recruit an unlimited number of migrants. It would even force the 8–10 million undocumented workers currently in the United States to sign up as temporary workers, as a step toward a very uncertain eventual legalization. Following Bush's announcement, Senators Tom Daschle and Chuck Hagel introduced a bill featuring many Administration proposals, including temporary-worker expansion.

But employers have worked both sides of the aisle, and more recent liberal proposals also set up new temporary-worker categories, softened with provisions for greater labor protection. Unlike the Bush scheme, the Gutierrez-Kennedy Bill, called the SOLVE Act, would not force currently undocumented workers to become guest workers. Instead it would allow people who have lived in the United States for the past five years, and worked for two years, to apply for permanent legal status. It would, however, allow employers to bring in up to 350,000 additional temporary workers, presumably through a recruitment system similar to the current one. Temporary-worker visas would be renewable, and last for either nine months or two years. Workers could bring spouses and children, and change employers after three months.

The most liberal proposal was introduced by Texas Congress member Sheila Jackson Lee, and is supported by members of the Congressional Black Caucus. It would allow people to normalize their status based on residency in the United States, and would expand the number of permanent residency visas. It contains no temporary-worker program.

Growers and farm-worker unions have agreed on a joint proposal, called the AgJOBS Bill, relaxing housing and wage requirements in current guest-worker programs and making it easier for growers to claim labor shortages, in exchange for a broad legalization program for undocumented farm workers.

Behind disagreement between individual provisions, however, is a deeper division over the purpose and nature of migration. How far should US immigration policy be shaped by the desire of US employers for labor? Should migration produce strong communities able to assert their rights, or should it supply labor to industry at a price it wants to pay?

Rick Mines points out that "there is no question that Mexican labor and the US industries that rely on it are profoundly interdependent, and this cannot and will not be eliminated with simple, unenforceable policies. The issue is not how to end this relationship, but how to lessen its negative effects."

In a world in which some 175 million people live outside the countries in which they were born, the flow of people across borders is inexorable, and growing. Immigration policy, rather than halting this process, affects the status of migrants in their new host countries. The UN Convention on Migrants Rights tries to guarantee a new set of rights for migrants corresponding to this new era of heightened global migration. It holds both sending and receiving countries responsible for their welfare, and proposes the goal of equal status of migrant and nonmigrant people. Predictably, countries sending migrants have ratified it, and those receiving them have not.

Despite the name, in guest-worker programs, "people are treated neither as guests nor as workers," says Andrew McGuffin, "but as slaves for rent." Rather than competing for workers by raising wages, employers seek a less expensive, more vulnerable labor force. If supplying this labor force is a primary goal of immigration policy, then legal protections for guest workers cannot be guaranteed, since they contradict its essential purpose. ■

Letter From Ground Zero

(Continued From Page 10)

even register? Actual events are too slight, too dim, too tangled and disappointing to spoil such a grand and satisfying tale.

But woe to the nation that turns its back on reality! As Auden reminds us, "A person who identifies his imaginary world with the world of sensory fact has become insane." America can be brought to its senses in two ways. One is the terrible discipline of events. The other—perhaps a final chance—is to vote the Bush Administration out of office in November. As Lincoln said in another time of national crisis, "We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." ■

Jonathan Schell is the Harold Willens Peace Fellow at the Nation Institute.

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

■ FDR or no FDR, the Congress of the United States would certainly use its power to impeach any Supreme Court that ruled that people who overthrew a democratic government in a military coup and abolished the Congress and the Constitution could not be prosecuted. Impunity for coup leaders really undermines the rule of law, as Vivanco would concede if he really cared about the law.

Aside from the Warren exception, the US Supreme Court has always been packed with bigots and scoundrels, and I'd welcome any unpacking the other way. Alas, as the late Walter Karp convincingly argued, FDR wasn't really serious in his packing bid, merely waving it as a distraction from the failure of his New Deal, which was saved only by war. The fact that the Venezuelan court was originally packed by a pro-Chávez assembly undermines Vivanco's argument; the man who picked most of the justices then, Luis Miquilena, later went over to the opposition and brought his judges with him. So much for the "independent" judiciary that Vivanco pretends to defend.

But let's get real: Before the decisive rejection of the recall by the voters on August 15, Vivanco and his cronies in the NED/State Department were hoping that the current court would rule against the government in any electoral dispute, as did the US Supreme Court in 2000. Vivanco is an ambitious NGO functionary playing a predictable role in the undergrowth of Empire.

In the intense national and international campaign to discredit the government of Venezuela, the Human Rights Watch report and its public relations campaign constituted a partisan and—for a human rights organization that is supposed to be politically neutral—entirely inappropriate intervention. Vivanco's conduct is a paradigm of everything that was correctly stigmatized by Arundhati Roy in her recent devastating commentary on the corruption of NGOs.

Her trenchant remarks can be found at www.counterpunch.org/cockburn08282004.html.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Black American in Paris

JAMES CAMPBELL

THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM.
By John A. Williams.
Overlook. 412 pp. Paper $14.95.

In the spring of 1960, the year of his death, the novelist Richard Wright wrote from Paris to his friend and Dutch translator Margrit de Sablonière:

> You must not worry about my being in danger.... I am not exactly unknown here and I have personal friends in the de Gaulle cabinet itself. Of course, I don't want anything to happen to me, but if it does my friends will know exactly where it comes from.... So far as the Americans are concerned, I'm worse than a Communist, for my work falls like a shadow across their policy in Asia and Africa.... They've asked me time and again to work for them: but I'd rather die first.

This letter contains the essence of John A. Williams's roman à clef, *The Man Who Cried I Am*, first published in 1967. Wright, an ex-Communist who had turned his back on the party and moved to France in 1946 but had never succeeded in throwing off the attentions of the American government, died unexpectedly in a Paris clinic eight months after writing those words to Sablonière in Leiden, Holland, and their eerie prescience has kept speculation about his death smoldering ever since. *The Man Who Cried I Am*, which opens in Leiden, brings a heavy load to the fire. It charts the journey through the 1940s and '50s of Max Reddick, a black novelist and journalist, leading up to the death of Reddick's friend and mentor, Harry Ames. Harry is an expatriate former Communist living in Paris with a white wife and a career on the slide. "I'm the way I am, the kind of writer I am, and you may be too," he tells Max early in the novel, which proceeds by way of flashbacks and a jigsaw structure, "because I'm a black man; therefore we're in rebellion; we've got to be. We have no other function as valid as that one."

This repudiation of writing that is not politically committed sets the tone of *The Man Who Cried I Am*. In the parallel, real-life story that runs a few feet below the surface of Williams's novel, Harry's remark also serves as a dismissal of James Baldwin's famous attack on Richard Wright as the author of "protest fiction" in his precocious essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," published in *Partisan Review* in 1949. Harry Ames is decisively committed, or as his French friends would have said, *engagé*. Harry has long been a thorn in the flesh of the American government, and Max suspects that someone—even someone from among their own cafe circle—was deputed to kill him. For Max, Harry's very existence was a challenge to white power; so his death is one more deferment of the dream of racial justice. The consequences, as set out here, are likely to be apocalyptic. Williams was surely in earnest in predicting a bloody reckoning, for he followed *The Man Who Cried I Am* with *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, a story written in the late 1960s but set in the next decade, with the uprising about to begin.

Williams's 1967 roman à clef illuminates the world of black literary expatriates who gathered around Richard Wright.

Wright was the pioneer and leader of a school of black writers who left behind the hazards of daily life in the United States in the late 1940s and early '50s for the comparative freedoms of France. Those who followed included not only Baldwin but also Chester Himes, William Gardner Smith and Richard Gibson. In his journal in January 1945, a year before his migration, Wright described Paris as "a place where one could claim one's soul."

That Harry Ames is a dead ringer for Richard Wright nobody would deny, least of all John A. Williams. In the 1990s, while researching a book about Anglophone literary

James Campbell's books include Exiled in Paris: Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Samuel Beckett and Others on the Left Bank, *and* Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin, *both recently reissued.*

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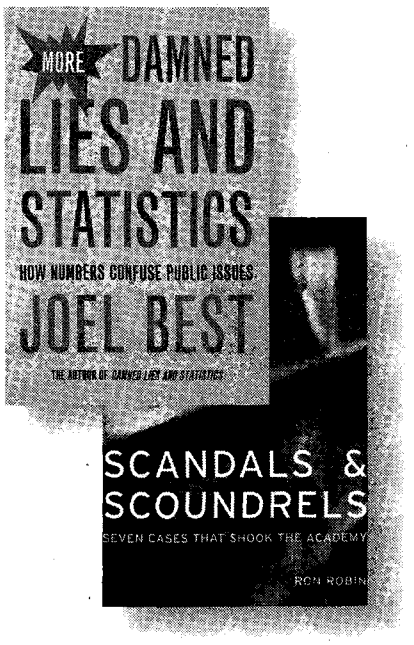
Scoundrels and Liars



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life in Paris after the Second World War, I asked Williams if it was fair to make the connection between Ames and Wright. He said it was. When asked if Wright might have been been assassinated by the American security services, Williams replied, "I would say his death was highly suspicious" (he added, "I wouldn't put it any stronger than that"). His suspicions arose from conversations with people who were in France at the time of Wright's death, most notably the novelist Chester Himes, who had been close to Wright though the two were by then estranged. Asked why the government would risk murdering a writer who was no longer a force in the civil rights movement, Williams said, "I do believe there is such a thing as teaching people a lesson."

The official cause of Wright's death on November 28, 1960, was the obstruction of a coronary artery—a heart attack. His body was cremated, without a post-mortem. Almost immediately, rumors began to circulate that he had been poisoned. A mystery woman was said to have visited his bedside an hour before he died. There was talk of an urgent telegram dispatched from the clinic. In his memoir, *My Life of Absurdity*, Himes named a "soul brother" by whom Wright felt he "was being persecuted." More than thirty years later, a friend of Wright from Paris days, the cartoonist Ollie Harrington, told me, "I *know* Richard Wright was assassinated" (despite promptings, he remained vague as to how he knew). Speaking on a BBC radio program about her father in October 1990, Julia Wright put it more subtly, giving credence to "a CIA plot to isolate him, in order to make him more vulnerable," thus fatally undermining his health. After a poorly attended service—Wright's wife, Ellen, had wished to keep it closed—the author's ashes were interred in Père Lachaise cemetery. In *The Man Who Cried I Am*, Max attends Harry's funeral in Paris: "Charlotte, Harry's wife was there, a few Americans.... There were some Africans, a few Indians. And it was only twenty hours after Harry had died."

The Man Who Cried I Am is the kind of novel that many novelists dream of writing—a bulging bag that seems to contain everything the author knows about life. It is a book that hums with sound and smell, and a good deal more hate than love. Its greatest strength is in making the reader feel the height and solidity of the oppressive wall that Max, Harry and others must negotiate daily, just to hoist themselves up to safety, to be able to say, "I am." In his introduction to the new edition, Walter Mosley compares it to *The Odyssey* and Max to Odysseus. "And the journey home is more dangerous than Odysseus could ever imagine," he writes with reckless abandon. The minutiae of Max's existence are crammed in, from his talent to his paranoia, down to his culinary skills. An odd touch of authenticity is added by the graphic descriptions of a rectal illness that plagues him throughout. *The Man Who Cried I Am* takes lungfuls of breath from the author's angry energy, and from his ability to convey to the reader his belief that he is uncovering hidden truths.

While Williams succeeds in bringing Max Reddick to life, he fails to make him likable. Max is a bristling bundle of conspiracy theories, glued together with hatred for white men and desire for white women. The latter seems at times closer to sadism than affection. Nothing good happens to Max—a job at *Pace* magazine (for *Pace*, read *Time*), a White House speechwriting assignment—that is not the product of white men's cynical maneuvering. There is scarcely a white male character who isn't a creep, and hardly a white female character who is not the target of the "cocksman" Max fancies himself. From one point of view, it is a bravura depiction of a peculiar pathology. From another, it feels as if Williams, intending to create a hero, has brought into being an emotional Frankenstein.

Williams emerged as the patience of the civil rights movement was hardening to anger, and he has always been an angry writer. His books are apt to take anger as a viable substitute for morality. His first novel was called *The Angry Ones*. In 1962 he edited a collection of writings called *The Angry Black*, to which he himself contributed a story about a writer, Wendell, who tries to seduce a white woman in her own home. She first welcomes his advances, then tries to disengage herself as her son is heard approaching, but Wendell holds her in a clinch just long enough for the 9-year-old to see them. By any standard of decency, Wendell's rationale is tantamount to child abuse: "no matter how his mother explains it away, the kid has the image for the rest of his life."

It is a form of revenge that Max Reddick could as easily have taken. In Max's eyes, bad luck is a stranger to whites—"What have you got to be nervous about?" he teases an associate. "You're white"—whereas almost every misfortune in a black life is traceable to color. Such an apprehension is enough to drive someone mad, and at times, rereading this novel, I felt that Max had taken leave of his senses. "Dying violently was a European habit," he reflects at one point, thinking of a French friend:

> All other deaths were commonplace. A European learned by his condition to expect catastrophe and invariably that

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was exactly what he received. In Europe, a winner was one who bested those common deaths arbitrarily assigned to others. You crawled, kissed behinds, ate *merde*, and grinned like you loved it. Living was everything. The final act of death was of no consequence; it was the living while everyone around died that counted.

Max's sexual politics are likely to seem equally unappetizing to a present-day readership (and probably did to many in 1967). Women are there for the taking. Max is the kind of fellow who passes the time in his office making lists of those he has slept with. He and Harry keep up a running joke about the unique delights of "redheads." The novel is shot through with reflections such as this, on Max's Dutch girlfriend, Margrit: "Time sped by. Now, she was almost thirty. In Europe that made you an old maid or a lesbian. Or a whore. Managing an art gallery hadn't helped. She had gone through a couple of painters, or more correctly, they had gone through her."

To what extent the reader is expected to accommodate Max because, as he says, "it was bad when I was born" (i.e., "born black"), is unclear, but I suspect that Williams feels he should be indulged quite a bit. Max certainly does. He lacks the faculty of self-examination. For example, he is said to be unpopular at the houses that have published his novels because "he...liked white women." Presented this way, it sounds like blatant racism, but might not the publishers simply be collating the observation about his love life with an insight Max provides into his own character: "Max had already given himself a name; he was a pimp without briefcase.... you borrowed money from the girl and the girl knew you'd never pay it back, and chances were, every time you met you'd borrow more money"? In Max's endlessly self-justifying hatred of the outside world, his tireless generalizing, there is no need for self-scrutiny, for every personal criticism can be deflected by the countercharge of racism.

Various figures who circled in Wright's orbit during his fourteen years in France are depicted under light disguise in *The Man Who Cried I Am*. A scene in a Left Bank cafe, involving Max, Harry Ames and a young disciple of Harry's called Marion Dawes, is a rough rendering of a meeting that took place in the spring of 1953 between Wright, Himes (the character of Max contains elements of Himes) and Baldwin. It was during this stormy encounter, recorded by all three principals, that Baldwin gave warning to Wright, "The sons must slay the fathers." In the first volume of his memoirs, *The Quality of Hurt*, Himes described the incident, adding that he thought at the

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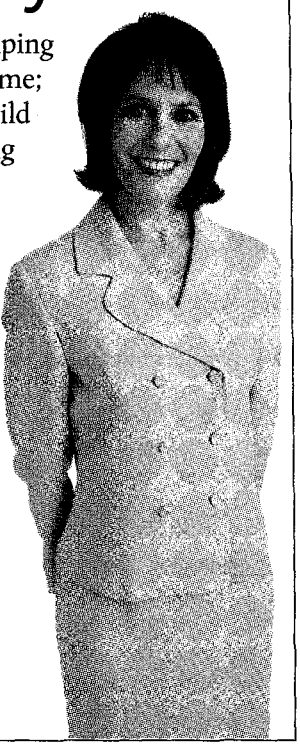

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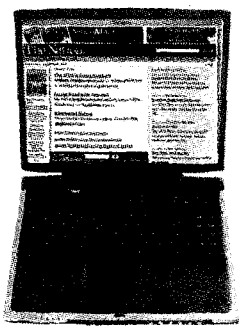

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time that Baldwin had gone crazy; "but in recent years I've come to better understand what he meant."

No such empathy is extended to the Baldwin character, Marion Dawes, who is treated unkindly. Baldwin and Williams, almost exact contemporaries, were never close, and it's hard to imagine that Baldwin would have been amused to see himself as Marion Dawes, whose homosexuality makes him a target for Max's disgust and ridicule. (It is suggested that Dawes gained a fellowship by means of which he moved to France by sleeping with certain people; in real life, Baldwin got a Eugene F. Saxton award on the recommendation of Wright.) Crucially for Max and Harry, Dawes is not a "writer in rebellion." The young Baldwin's concerns were more aesthetic than political, and he spent his nine years in Paris coaching his heart to exorcise the outrage that he feared would kill him if left to fester. Max, on the other hand, is consumed by anger. He cannot pick up the telephone without seeing it as "another one of the white man's inventions," and reflecting that it was "ironic that one must inevitably come to use the tools of the destroyer in order to destroy him, or to save oneself."

Near the end of the novel, Max is trying to relay to a Malcolm X figure, Minister Q, the contents of a file discovered among Harry's papers, which outlines the King Alfred Plan, an FBI- and CIA-designed scheme to "terminate, once and for all, the Minority threat" and to consolidate the league of nations known as the "Alliance blanc," or White Alliance. In his afterword, Williams compares the King Alfred Plan, his own invention, to intelligence programs devised by J. Edgar Hoover in the 1960s to monitor the movements of black militants, which did not become public until much later. Harry is already a victim of the King Alfred Plan, and Max fears that he is about to become another.

The Man Who Cried I Am is an absorbing story about the way some people were thinking and acting in the 1950s. It is driven by a furious beat, and constantly illuminated by the real-life drama behind the fictional one. It is let down by loose writing and a lack of generous characterization. The latter may be ascribed to Max's solipsism, and no doubt there are powerful psychological reasons for that, but a solipsist is hardly a trustworthy guide. Walter Mosley's ingenious classical comparison must be tested against the objection that Max is not a tragic hero but a pathetic one, wounded as much by vanity and self-pity as by racism.

Does the conspiracy theory about Wright's death have any basis in reality? No one has provided a shred of forensic evidence to support the notion that he was murdered. From another angle, however, it is possible to argue that Wright's premature death was willed by the state. In the early 1990s, I visited Wright's widow, Ellen, in her apartment in St-Germain des Près. She spoke about Wright's quarrels with Baldwin and others, and said how futile it all seemed to her now that these great men were gone. "My husband lived with tension all his life," Mrs. Wright said. "Every day, awful tension." If there is an alternative cause of death to be inserted beside the official entry on Wright's records, then that is surely it. ■

In the Bedroom (with Stalin)

RONALD SUNY

STALIN: The Court of the Red Tsar. By Simon Sebag Montefiore. Knopf. 785 pp. $30.

THE UNKNOWN STALIN: His Life, Death, and Legacy. By Roy Medvedev and Zhores Medvedev. Overlook. 335 pp. $29.95.

Stalin continues to fascinate—the central mystery within the riddle inside the enigma that was the Soviet Union. If you Google "Stalin, biography," 166,000 websites come up. Amazon offers more than 8,000 titles with his name in it, many of which qualify as biographies, whole or partial. The man who toward the end of his life was arguably the most powerful individual in the world had at various earlier times been seen as a "gray blur," "the man who missed the revolution," "a non-entity hooked by history," "the marvelous Georgian," "Generalissimo" and "History's villain." Why would anyone contemplate yet another biography? What is it that we need to know that is not already available? As someone engaged at the moment in writing a biography of the young Stalin (up to 1924, the year of Lenin's death), doubts dissipate each time I return to Moscow or Tbilisi and enter the archives. A man like Stalin is not easily put aside by the dismissive phrase "of interest only to historians." His latest biographers, Simon Sebag Montefiore and Roy and Zhores Medvedev, seem to think that even the most trivial material provides its own sensation of discovery, and in their archival diggings they have come up with new, though not always particularly important, tidbits, as well as gripping stories of people caught in deadly political games that stretched over decades.

The authors come from quite different backgrounds, though their approaches join them in a common enterprise. Montefiore is a talented journalist, the author of a well-regarded biography of Prince Grigorii Potemkin, Catherine the Great's adviser and lover (those two positions often went hand in hand), as well as a novelist. A prodigious researcher, he mined Russian archives, traveled to Stalin's birthplace, Georgia, to his various homes and hideaways as far away as war-torn Abkhazia, unearthed unpublished memoirs and carried out numerous interviews with anyone who knew Stalin and would talk to him (including most of his living descendants, with the notable exception of the reclusive Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter).

Twin brothers Roy and Zhores Medvedev have enjoyed long careers as chroniclers of Stalinism and its crimes. Roy is best known for his mammoth study, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, while Zhores, a biologist and science writer, wrote a chronicle of the tragic experience of Soviet geneticists, *The Rise and Fall of T.D. Lysenko*. Expelled by the Soviet government in 1973, Zhores continued his critical opposition to Brezhnev's USSR from London. Brother Roy, though not quite a full-fledged dissident, was a gadfly who criticized the regime from what can be described as a "Leninist humanist" position. The Medvedevs were members of the generation of *shestidesniatniki*, "sixties people," among the first to raise their voices during the Khrushchev years to urge the regime to carry the denunciation of Stalin into a "return to Leninism," by which they meant a more democratic socialism with genuine respect for "socialist legality." After the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, the social democratic wing of the intelligentsia withered, eclipsed by Westernizing liberals like Andrei Sakharov from one side and, from the other, by Slavophilic

Ronald Suny, a professor of history and political science at the University of Chicago, is the author, most recently, of A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin *(Oxford).*

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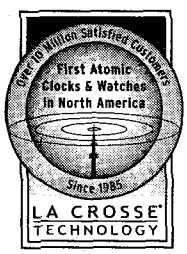

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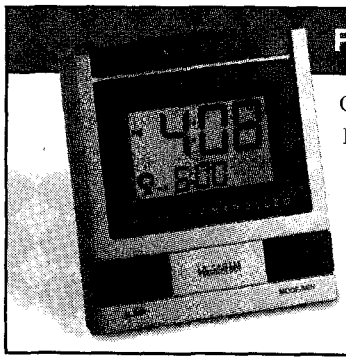

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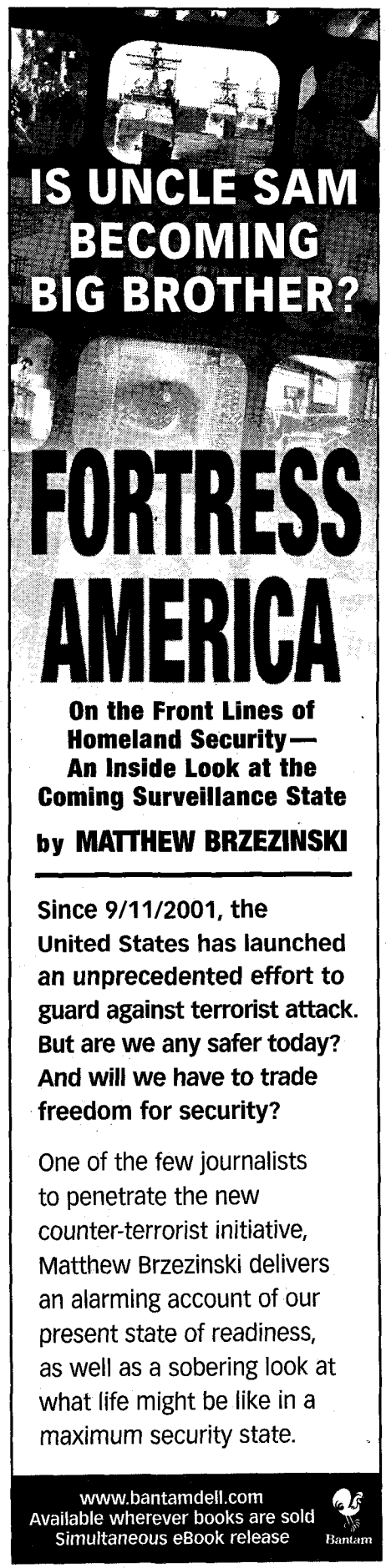
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conservatives and nationalists like Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The Medvedevs continued writing, but they were lonely witnesses, better known in the West and in Sovietological circles than among their own countrymen. Roy Medvedev enjoyed a brief political resurrection in the Gorbachev years when the general secretary flirted with socialist democracy, unsure to the end what that would entail, and in the process destroyed not only the Communist Party but the empire he had hoped to save.

Joseph Stalin was the real creator of the Soviet system as it became consolidated in the 1930s, nearly collapsed before the Nazi invasion and was reconstructed after the war. His successors significantly modified aspects of the system—most important, the arbitrary terror, mass arrests and executions; the nearly total isolation from the outside world; and the confiscatory policies of the state toward the peasants. But until the Gorbachev reforms, its fundaments remained intact: the one-party monopoly on political and economic power; the largely marketless command economy; state control of the media and intellectual expression; and official commitment to a state-socialist version of Marxism. From 1934 to his death, Stalin's power was so absolute that his own will determined not only how the system was built and operated but the destinies of hundreds of millions of people. He and his "magnates" (as Montefiore calls the members of his inner circle) personally signed the death sentences of hundreds of thousands of people. They set the quotas for how many would be arrested, exiled or shot. Stalin and Churchill, like two aging real estate brokers, sat across from each other in October 1944 and determined which of their countries would dominate which state in the Balkans. When Churchill expressed qualms about deciding the fate of so many people so casually, he asked Stalin if they should burn the note on which he had written the infamous "percentages agreement." "No," said Stalin, "you keep it." In the last years, when his health and mental stability deteriorated, he kept Mao Zedong, the recent victor in the Chinese civil war and ruler over the most populous state in the world, cooling his heels for months in Moscow, both to wear him down into making concessions and to show him who was boss in the international Communist movement.

Stalin biographies, like the classic work by Isaac Deutscher, have usually emphasized the great political decisions of the *vozhd* (leader), the forces that shaped his choices, the social and economic constraints that dictated a particular path. When they dealt with his personality, as in the psychohistorical account by Robert Tucker, it was usually to emphasize how the brutality of his father and the poverty from which he rose forged a hard, steely character driven in equal measure by ambition and suspicion. The inner workings of Stalin's mind remained a deep mystery, as few personal letters, diaries or memoirs of those close to him were available. Montefiore's massive volume is one of the first to delve deeply into the newly accessible facts of Stalin's family and friendships to give us the personal side of Stalin the man, the husband, the suspicious comrade, the stern father, as well as the public actor. Montefiore has recorded every rumor and whisper, bits of gossip, late-night table talk, each personal slight or suspicious sideways glance, and through them given us a portrait of the tyrant.

Montefiore's Stalin will not surprise most readers. The brute is familiar to us. But in the relentless detail, the mood-setting descriptions of the leader's surroundings, the sketches of the people around him and in Stalin's own words, pranks and tempers, Montefiore gives us not only the most intimate view of the general secretary that we have to date but a rounded and complex portrait of a man who could go from charming to lethal in the space of a few seconds. Montefiore's Stalin is first of all a Bolshevik, which for the author means a disciplined, ruthless person ready to use violence whenever necessary. "War was the natural state of the Bolsheviks and they were good at it." (There is, astonishingly, almost no discussion in the book about Marxism or the history of the Social Democratic movement in Russia, no serious engagement with the complexities of inner party disputes about doctrine and practice, and Bolshevism is reduced to what it became under Stalin.) The man himself had the requisite qualities to succeed almost unimpeded in the competitive world of party politics. He possessed both an indomitable will and supersensitive antennae attuned to the political airways. Emotionally stunted, incapable of true empathy, indifferent to the suffering that he caused, he was, nevertheless, occasionally able to extend a kind and generous gesture to a victim. Though he had been damaged as a boy by the violence in his family, and remained insecure and suspicious to the end of his life, he was a "people person," a "master of friendships," and ruled as much through charisma as through raw fear. He was abnormal like most politicians, Montefiore says, with a totally obsessive character that fitted Marxism. Like other members of the Bolshevik elite, he suffered from an inferiority complex, had a chip on his shoulder and exploded in irrational tem-

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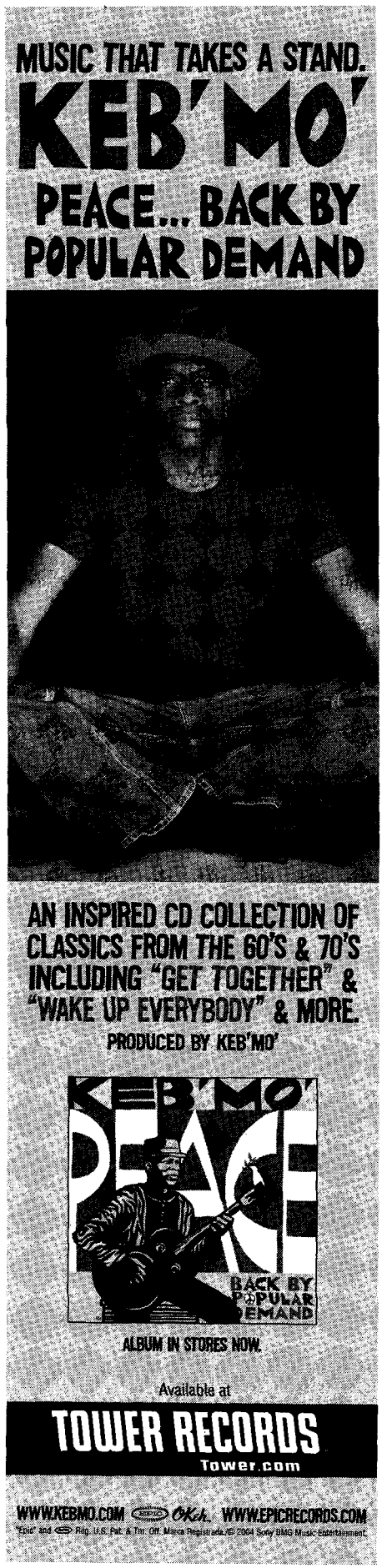
pers. Yet he inspired trust, and even deep love, from those around him (even from those whom he had imprisoned and tortured!). His simplicity, personal asceticism, feigned modesty and mocking humor attracted people, especially women, to him. But throughout his life, especially after the suicide of his second wife, Nadya Alliluyeva, in 1932, and increasingly toward the end, he was lonely. He desperately required people around him and forced his courtiers to indulge in long nocturnal banquets that stretched into morning and ended up with the drunken Kremlin denizens staggering into their limousines.

It is no accident that biographies are among the bestselling books dealing with history. Personalities, especially of celebrated figures, offer readers apparently easy access to dense and difficult questions about politics. But the emphasis on personality, so essential in a biography, can lead to an overemphasis on the determining effect of the person and a neglect of context and social forces. Certainly, Montefiore gestures toward the contribution of "vast political, economic and diplomatic forces," like those that led to the Great Terror of the late 1930s, but he is far less concerned with those forces than with more mundane, quotidian matters and personal relations. It can certainly be argued that when a politician accumulates the degree of power that Stalin did, in a system without institutional restraints on it, his personal whims and preferences take on a power comparable to great economic and social forces. Nevertheless, even absolute monarchs or totalitarian dictators are constrained by forces beyond their control. The level of development of the country or the strength of other states confronting the ruler's state make some moves possible and others not. Moreover, once certain choices are made, certain paths chosen, others are precluded.

The large historiographical questions that have puzzled professional historians—notably, whether Stalinism was a continuation or a bloody perversion of Leninism—are not addressed. Was the revolution doomed from its onset, as conservative scholars have argued, or were there choices that might have led to a different outcome? Stalin had various options at decisive moments, but they were limited. The Soviet Union was in his time a relatively poor country, backward by European standards, whose population was largely made up of impoverished, uneducated peasants living in isolated villages. And it was faced by powerful adversaries—imperial Britain in its first decade, Nazi Germany in the 1930s and early '40s, and the United States after 1945—that limited his options. At the same time, Stalin's own actions—declaring war on his own peasantry in the collectivization campaigns of the early 1930s, employing massive terror against his own party, the intelligentsia and, most disastrous for the security of the state, the military—determined what in that new environment the dictator could do and how others would react. Eerily, at certain moments, Stalin turned to one or another of his policemen and asked about a certain comrade that he wanted for a certain job only to be told that that person had been executed.

The picture drawn by Montefiore is a dark one of court intrigues, debauched satraps vying for the emperor's ear. Alcohol was the drug of choice among the Soviet elite, and many died of alcoholism. While his henchman Lavrenti Beria's proclivities for young women, who either satisfied his needs or ended up in prison, are well-known, the level of sexual promiscuity that Montefiore reports will be new to most readers. Bolsheviks have conventionally been renowned for their puritanism (Stalin did not like kissing in films), and the most durable of Communists, like Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan, were dedicated family men. But Montefiore, whose most frequently used word appears to be "womanizer," documents the sexual adventures of other magnates. Stalin himself, the object of attention of many women, appears to have been moderate in his sexual appetites. ("Stalin was no womanizer: He was married to Bolshevism and emotionally committed to his own drama in the cause of Revolution.") Montefiore maintains that Stalin's greatest personal suffering came with the loss of his beautiful Nadya. He grieved alone for days, wept bitterly at her funeral and threatened to resign from his high office. His greatest affection was directed to his daughter, Svetlana, though even she could be brusquely excluded from his company. When the young girl found affection from an older man, the film writer Alexei Kapler, Stalin flew into a rage, had Kapler sentenced to five years in the notorious Vorkuta camp and banished Svetlana for months.

Stalin's rage in this case was not simply that of a patriarchal Georgian upset at his daughter's relationship with a married man. Kapler was Jewish, and Stalin shared the general prejudices of his countrymen. Stalin's view of peoples stems from a belief in national character based in culture and social environment (Jews were considered a separate nationality in the USSR). Such ideas were difficult to reconcile with a Marxism that views social determination as prior to cultural, the nation as a product



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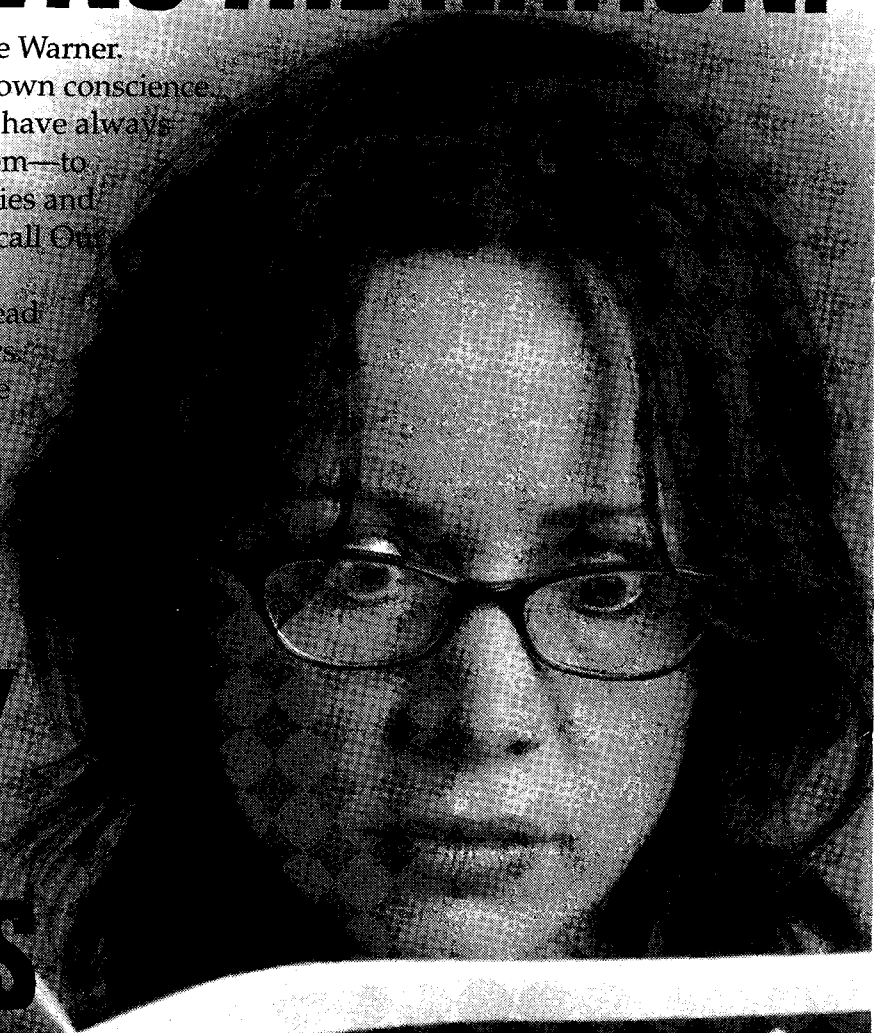

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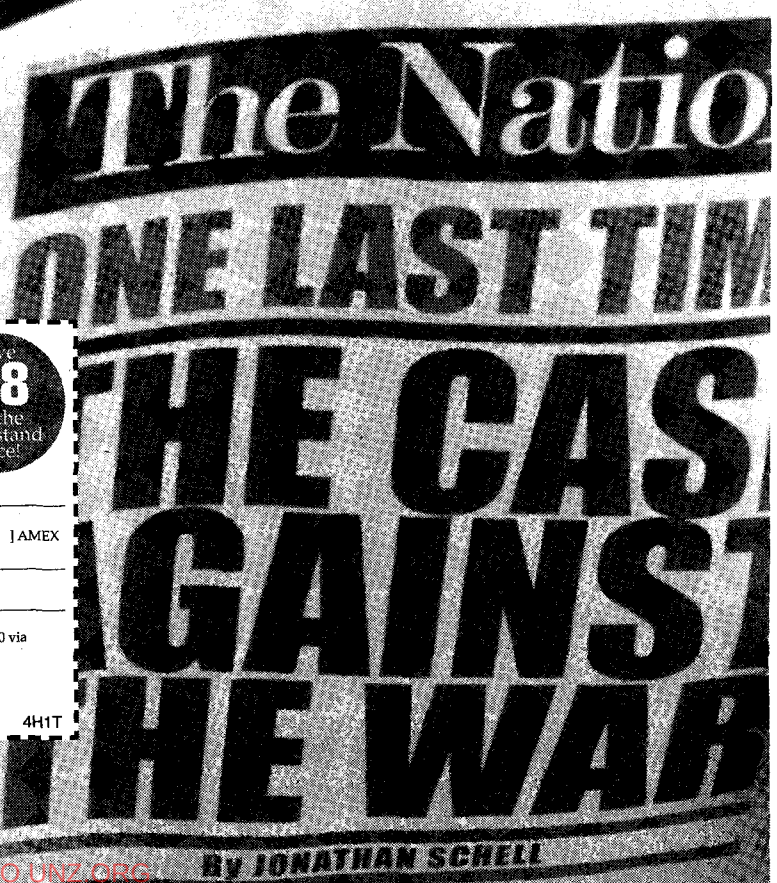

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of a definite stage of history, and ethnicity as situational and malleable. The Soviet state had been from its earliest days a place where many Jews had flourished. Although Zionists and religious Jews were persecuted, the pre–World War II USSR legislated against expressions of anti-Semitism and sponsored mass demonstrations against Hitler's persecutions of Jews. The Soviet Union was among the first states to grant de jure recognition to the state of Israel, even before the United States. Yet, whether positive or negative, stereotypical views of Jews and other nationalities were part of Soviet discourse. By the late 1940s Stalin was convinced that the "rootless" Jews were a global danger to the Soviet Union, and he turned on Soviet Jews with a vengeance. In his last years he presided over purges of Jewish intellectuals, personally ordering the murder of the Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels, engineering the blatantly anti-Semitic "Anti-Cosmopolitan" campaign and prodding his torturers to obtain confessions from the victims in the completely fabricated "Doctors' Plot."

When it came to state terror, Stalin was at the center. Here the strengths and weaknesses of Montefiore's approach to history are most evident. Like Robert Conquest before him, Montefiore sees Stalin as indispensable to the Terror, though he maintains that the killing began with Lenin and "reflected the village hatreds of the incestuous Bolshevik sect where jealousies had seethed from the years of exile and war." Terror is an intrinsic part of Bolshevism for Montefiore. He makes no effort to distinguish the scale and purpose of the Great Terror from the far less murderous Red Terror of the Civil War days, when White killings far outstripped Red ones in the midst of a fratricidal war. In the 1930s the regime turned on its own for reasons that remain unfathomable to many historians. Montefiore piles on possible explanations in addition to the nature of Bolshevism: Stalin was replicating Ivan the Terrible's campaign against his boyars, strengthening and centralizing his state as his admired predecessor had done; he was dealing with the corruption of the old elite and making way for a new Soviet-trained elite; he was curbing regional lords, removing the threat to his power from the generals, eliminating the last remnants of political opposition, while creating scapegoats for economic and social disruptions caused by the regime's own policies. Too many explanations are almost as bad as none. What does emerge is what most historians have always proposed—that Stalin ordered, directed, propelled forward and ultimately called a halt to the Terror largely from a Machiavellian fear of actual and potential opposition to his consolidation of autocratic power. In the great bloodletting of the late 1930s, three-quarters of a million people were executed and countless hundreds of thousands tortured, imprisoned or exiled. Just days after Stalin died, the imprisoned doctors, at least those who had survived, were released, and within months an amnesty freed both criminal and political prisoners. Terror was replaced by a more familiar police state, in which arbitrary arrest on trumped-up charges was no longer systemic.

The Unknown Stalin of the Medvedevs tells much the same story as Montefiore, but it is a different kind of book. Made up of discrete essays by one or the other brother, the book is a hodgepodge of bits and pieces about Stalin, primarily about science and foreign policy, with something here about Bukharin, something there about Stalin's mother. It has much interesting material, culled from memoirs, personal experience and published materials, but there is no consistent theme or compelling organization of its contents. Well-written, easy reading, the text adds little to what is available elsewhere, though for a Stalin buff it has its own fascination. Chapters cover episodes like the making of the Soviet atomic bomb, Khrushchev's "secret speech" of 1956 and Stalin's intentions to make Mikhail Suslov his heir. There is an exploration of the "riddles" surrounding Stalin's death that concludes there was no plot to kill him. The Medvedevs' account of the succession differs from Montefiore's in some details. Whereas they give Khrushchev and Defense Minister Nikolai Bulganin the major role in forming the post-Stalin government, Montefiore sees Beria as the chief operator at that fateful time.

With Montefiore's bedroom revelations, one would think we have reached the bottom of the barrel. Where to go next? Into the bathroom? Indeed, he has a scene of Stalin defecating by a railroad track with his traveling companions looking on! There are moments in both books where the grandeur of the decisions made by petty and vicious men elevates the story. The drama of the war years, when Stalin managed to pull himself together and act on the world stage as generalissimo and statesman, is brilliantly told by Montefiore as a tale of small men rising, reaching beyond themselves against the backdrop of heroic sacrifice on the part of millions. But for Montefiore great ideas or grand visions are less what the "Red Tsar" was about than insecurity and intrigue. Deadly intraparty politics had been Stalin's training ground, and it contributed both to his unsentimental, realist apprecia-

On Being Asked During a National Crisis to Write a Poem in Celebration of the Bicentennial of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Caught up in a metaphorical swoon
by the oversoul in his head
War is on its last legs, he said.
The question is only How Soon.
Swayed by the cradling springs of his bed-
rock trust in the final perfec-
tibility of man, he elec-
ted Nature and found Her good.
This week a hunter sighting his gun
on a flock of ducks at that sacramental
hour when waterfowl season opens
said *pulling the trigger is transcendental.*

Maxine Kumin

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tion of international power politics and to a paranoia that foreclosed certain opportunities. The two books together give us a picture of the banality of politics at court. Whether the court is led by the son of a cobbler or the son of a president, politics up close looks far less like the pomp of costume pictures and more like a meeting at the Bada Bing. However finely they dress in public, emperors really have no clothes. ■

Dangerous Liaisons

ROBERT BAER

THE NEW PEARL HARBOR: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11. By David Ray Griffin. Interlink. 214 pp. Paper $15.

Conspiracy theories are hard to kill. They've dogged virtually every national tragedy in our history, from the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy to the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and what David Ray Griffin now claims is our new Pearl Harbor: 9/11. What's different about this conspiracy theory is the degree to which it has been helped along by its main suspect: the Administration of George W. Bush.

Bush's initial refusal to investigate September 11 started the ball rolling. When he caved in to political pressure and agreed to a commission, he picked the worst possible chairman, Henry Kissinger, whose legendary but secret client list no doubt includes countries suspected of involvement in the attack. The real traction, though, has come from Iraq. By consciously misleading Americans about Saddam Hussein's role in September 11 to justify an invasion, Bush answered the question every good conspiracy theory turns on: Who benefits?

Griffin's subtitle suggests this book is a search for truth, but don't let that fool you. His mind is all but made up. For a start, Griffin simply cannot accept that our national security system totally failed all on its own on September 11. What went wrong with an air defense system we'd been told would protect us from far more sophisticated attacks? Can the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) really be that incompetent? The FAA concluded that American Airlines Flight 11 had been hijacked at approximately 8:20 AM. An hour and forty-three minutes later, United Airlines Flight 93 crashed into the ground at Shanksville, Pennsylvania. In between, the few F-16s that did scramble seemed to have flown everywhere except in the right direction, but even if they had found the hijacked airplanes, authority from the White House to shoot them down arrived after the fact or was relayed too late.

Then there are the FBI and the CIA. The two federal agencies charged with protecting us from terrorist attacks say they were surprised by 9/11 even though bin Laden all but took out an ad in the *New York Times* telling us when and where he was going to attack. Nor was recent history mute on how such an attack might go down. In 1994 an Algerian Islamic group ideologically affiliated with bin Laden hijacked an Air France plane and would have flown it into the Eiffel Tower if the French hadn't stormed the plane during a refueling stop. A year later the Manila police uncovered a plot to blow up a dozen commercial airliners over the Pacific. Their investigation revealed that one of the Manila plotters, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, had considered enticing some suicide-minded pilot to fly his airplane into the CIA headquarters. KSM, as we now know, would go on to mastermind 9/11.

Was anyone listening back then at the FAA or the Defense Department? Apparently not, but it gets worse. In January 2000, two members of KSM's cell managed to slip into the United States and set up in San Diego although the CIA had them on a watch list for plotting attacks in East Asia. We're told someone at the CIA neglected to inform the FBI, and the two made their flights on September 11. All this and still no one was fired or reprimanded?

So far, so good, but the 9/11 Commission has rendered much of the detail of this book stale news. What's notable about Griffin's take on these events is how easily he leaps to larger evils, a conspiracy at the top. Griffin is a thoughtful, well-informed theologian who before September 11 probably would not have gone anywhere near a conspiracy theory. But the catastrophic failures of that awful day are so implausible and the lies about Iraq so blatant, he feels he has no choice but to recycle some of the wilder conspiracy theories, several of which were popularized by the crackpot author Thierry Meyssan in *L'Effroyable Imposture*, a bestseller in France:

§ that the Pentagon was hit by a missile rather than by American Airlines Flight 77;

§ that since it was impossible for the World Trade Center to collapse under the impact of an airplane, it had to have been brought down by internal explosives;

§ that United Airlines Flight 93 was shot down when it was learned that the passengers had taken control of the airplane because the conspirators could not risk the passengers' getting off the plane and telling what really happened;

§ and that, most shocking of all, the Bush Administration knew the attack was coming and either let it happen or abetted the plotters as a way of jolting the nation into accepting its policy of pre-emptive warfare and transforming the Middle East.

It's a monstrous proposition, which makes this a monstrous but in some ways important book. Someone, after all, should be asking in print why our foreign policy seems to have fallen into the hands of some malevolent band of Marx Brothers. For all its merits, the *9/11 Commission Report* doesn't even attempt to answer this question. Griffin's book does, but since he's an outsider to Washington's Byzantine ways, he falls back on wacky theories.

Halfway through this litany of what went wrong September 11 and why, I found myself thinking about one morning shortly after I joined the CIA. I was drinking a cup of coffee, reading the morning traffic, when a fellow desk officer sitting next to me said out of the blue: "You know, it was the CIA that took down Nixon." I waited for the punch line, but he wasn't joking. "The Watergate burglars taped the door open on purpose," he continued. "The plan was for a security guard to find the tape, call the police, and leave enough bread crumbs along the way to finger Nixon. Why else would they leave tape on the door like that?"

Working for an outfit that does break-ins for a living, I had to agree that leaving tape on the door was an act of gross incompetence. During basic training, the first thing they teach is that you always "pick to decode"— make a key. One of the Watergate burglars, James McCord, had been a CIA security officer; he definitely knew that taping or jamming open a door is the quickest way to get caught in a black-bag operation. Stranger still, at the arraignment McCord

Robert Baer, a CIA case officer in the Middle East from 1976 to 1997, is the author of Sleeping With the Devil *(Crown).*

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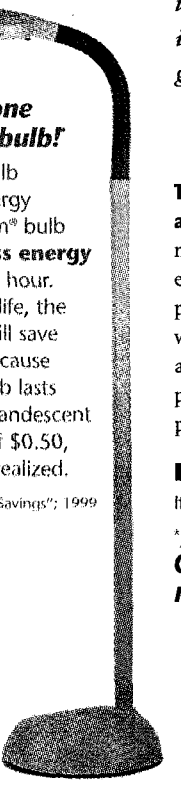

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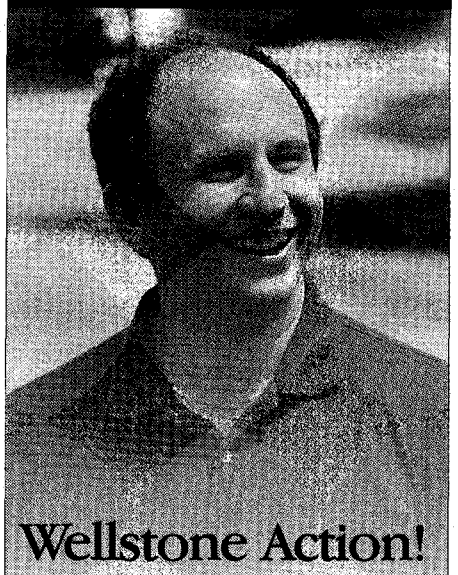

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volunteered that he was a CIA agent, another major Langley no-no. From my office mate's point of view, McCord was practically handing Nixon's head on a platter to the *Washington Post*. If I worked at it hard enough, I could have come up with a reason the CIA might have wanted to take Nixon down. (It wasn't so Spiro Agnew could take his place.) It was the idea of a conspiracy itself that I never could accept.

Yes, the CIA was formed, in essence, to conduct and foment conspiracies, but even within the vaulted offices of Langley, a secret like that couldn't have lasted twenty-four hours before it had been leaked to the *Times*, the *Post* and at least two of what were then the three major TV networks. And so it is with Griffin's Pearl Harbor hypothesis. Like most conspiracies, it has the allure of a deeper truth, but experience tells me that although this Administration is dedicated to keeping the truth away from the average citizen, it could never have acquiesced in so much human slaughter and kept it a secret. Especially when so many people would have to have been involved.

This is what I think happened on September 11. The trillions we put into national security were wasted. The military's early warning system, the CIA's and the FBI's ability to collect and process intelligence, and the White House's ability to deal with a national emergency never adapted to the new threat, terrorism, and the end of the cold war. Fail-safe procedures fail routinely, and depending on them is anything but safe. It wasn't a conspiracy of silence that allowed Osama bin Laden to succeed so spectacularly in his mission; it was a confluence of incompetence, spurious assumptions and self-delusion on a grand scale.

As more facts emerge about September 11, many of Griffin's questions should be answered, but his suspicions will never be put to rest as long as the Bush Administration refuses to explain why it dragged this country into the most senseless war in its history. Until then, otherwise reasonable Americans will believe the Bush Administration benefited from 9/11, and there will always be a question about what really happened on that day. ■

ART

A Tribe Called Quest

ARTHUR C. DANTO

LEE BONTECOU

Walking through the retrospective exhibition of Lee Bontecou, on view at MoMA-Queens, is uncannily like visiting an out-of-the-way museum of natural history, as if her entire work to date had been dedicated to the creation of a single work of installation art: a *musée imaginaire*. It begins with some animal sculptures and continues through what look like scientific instruments—cameras and other devices for the observation and recording of nature. These evolve into larger and larger structures, made of wire armatures covered with scraps of used fabric, each with one or two dark holes; like tribal masks, they convey an air of menace and mystery. One could construct a speculative anthropology for these extraordinary structures—what they mean, and how they function. We could imagine an entire culture, a cargo cult, as it were, dedicated to their fabrication out of salvaged metal and found cloth. Next, one passes vitrines displaying translucent flora, or perhaps insects or even enlarged marine creatures midway between animalcules and vegetation. Then, suddenly, one encounters forms that are immediately recognized as fish, with spiky fins, goggle eyes and dangerous teeth, which evoke corresponding features in what, for want of a better term, I have been calling masks. There are some drawings, quite beautiful, of flowers or flowerlike forms, and of fish. A large fish, seemingly clad with natural armor, is suspended from the ceiling. Now we encounter some mollusklike shapes on pedestals, some drawings of waves, reminiscent of exquisite drawings of waves by Leonardo. In the final galleries are models for visionary spacecraft, with propellers and sails—or they could be large models of mosquitolike bugs—and then some suspended galaxies, imaginary planetary systems of exceptional delicacy containing bodies that have the appearance of eyeballs. And there are sheets

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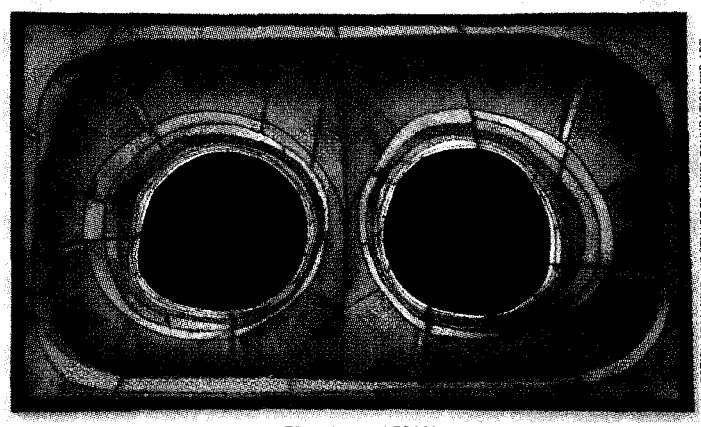
on which eyes—human, animal, bird, insect, fish—are finely drawn. Taken as a whole, the installation is like a cabinet of wonders.

Bontecou is 73, and the show provides a chronological survey of nearly half a century of artistic production. Since she has not exhibited in New York for more than thirty years, the exhibition also offers an answer to a question not infrequently asked in the art world: *Whatever happened to Lee Bontecou?* Her considerable reputation rests on the large metal-and-fabric objects first shown in Leo Castelli's gallery in 1960. These seemed to belong with the most advanced art of the era, and at the same time to carry an aura of scary otherness. In a critical essay published in 1965, Donald Judd paid tribute to both aspects of these works. "Lee Bontecou was one of the first to use a three-dimensional form that was neither painting nor sculpture," he wrote, giving her credit for overcoming the sharp division between different media that critics like Clement Greenberg had insisted upon, in favor of what Judd designated as "specific objects." But Judd went on to say, "The image cannot be contemplated; it has to be dealt with as an object, at least viewed with puzzlement and wariness, as would be any strange object, and at most seen with terror, as would be a beached mine or a well hidden in the grass. The image extends from something as social as war to something as private as sex, making one an aspect of the other." Bontecou's objects lent themselves to the most rarefied speculations on the ontology of the artwork, and at the same time confronted the viewer with something almost frighteningly aggressive, like the effigies of protective monsters guarding sacred sites. Nothing like that had existed, as austere as geometry and as terrifying as Minotaurs.

Though her pieces are three-dimensional, they are all frontal and are intended to hang at eye level. And each is organized around an orifice, rather than simply a hole, which has a depth and blackness. The menace of the pieces is conveyed by this opening. Bontecou interestingly refers to the mouth in the celebrated *Bocca della Verità*—"the Mouth of Truth"—which she must have gotten to know while a Fulbright scholar in Rome in the late 1950s. It is a large circular carving of a bearded face with an open mouth from ancient Roman times, now part of the facade of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. The face has other openings—eyes and nostrils—and is said to have been a sewer cover in ancient Rome. The legend is that if one tells a lie and then puts one's hand into the "Mouth of Truth," it will be bitten off. The defining orifices of Bontecou's work imply the sudden violence of a stone mouth. Or it could be the empty eye-socket of a cyclopean presence that still manages to hold us in its baleful stare. It signals the vaginal opening to many and, when fitted with points or industrial zippers, one or another mode of female fearfulness to others. Whatever interpretation one draws, it has the primordial fascination of a dark opening into an alien interior, which we penetrate at our own risk.



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Untitled, 1959/60

The metal armature is designed with reference to the opening. In a typical piece, there are concentric metal rings around the opening, with rods radiating further back from the opening, like rays. In a way, one could think of the metal pieces as mullions in a stained-glass structure, with the spaces filled in with fitted scraps of fabric rather than glass. The fabric patches, in various shades of brown or tan, are held in place with twists of wire. In photographs they look like pieces of intarsia—those works made of pieces of shaped and colored wood that became a genre of art in the Renaissance, esteemed as highly as painting because of the geometrical knowledge that went into their design as well as the woodworker's skills. (There is an entire room made of intarsia at the Metropolitan Museum—the Studiolo of the Ducal Palace in Gubbio.) Bontecou's geometry is intuitive and irregular, of course, and the objects more abstract. She fits into the surface found objects that augment their threat— saw blades, metal cages, industrial zippers—and often auxiliary openings. They are works of inspired *bricolage*, to borrow the word used by Claude Lévi-Strauss to characterize the logic of primitive thought. But everything is calculated to emphasize the opening, which grips the fascinated viewer like a potential victim.

That the creator of such work was a slight young woman with a Joan-of-Arc haircut may have contributed to the tremendous acclaim it enjoyed in the 1960s. Back then, the photographs of Bontecou standing next to her fierce creations nearly made her an icon. One still sees pieces from that period in collections of twentieth-century American art, and there is a very large piece in the State Theater at Lincoln Center, commissioned by the architect Philip Johnson. But as the years passed without showings of new work, the question of what happened to so striking an artist could not but arise. Two enterprising curators—Elizabeth Smith of the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and Ann Philbin of the UCLA Hammer Museum—set out to solve the mystery. They discovered Bontecou in rural Pennsylvania, where, after teaching art at Brooklyn College, she had retired into a life of quiet obscurity. Yet Bontecou hadn't stopped making art. She had simply withdrawn from an art world somewhat demoralizingly encapsulated in the banner of a recent print by Barbara Kruger: "Another artist/Another exhibition/Another gallery/Another magazine/Another review/Another career/Another life," blazoned across the image of a growling leopard with Bontecou-style fangs. Plenty of artists vanish from the art world, some more willingly than others. But leaving it without fanfare, at the height of one's powers and reputation, as Bontecou did—just slipping away—had no precedent. Duchamp pretended to have given up art in favor of chess for twenty-five years, though he never entirely exited the scene and was secretly working on his enigmatic masterpiece, *Étant données*. I suppose the closest parallel would be J.D. Salinger, who turned his back on a success that any writer might envy for the reclusive existence of a literary hermit. Fortunately, Bontecou consented to the idea of a full retrospective of her work, which ends its tour at MoMA-Queens on September 27.

Taken all together, Bontecou's *oeuvre* is like that of no other artist I know. There is a distant affinity with the engravings that illustrate a famous book of 1665—Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*. Hooke was curator of experiments at the Royal Society of London, with the boundless curiosity of a seventeenth-century natural philosopher—

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interested in flight and the design of clocks and, as he belonged to the first generation of microscopists, in revealing the minute structures of things up to then invisible or barely visible. *Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses* is the book's subtitle. With the aid of the recently invented microscope, Hooke examined the structure of feathers, the stinger of bees, the "tongue" of mollusks and the feet and mandibles of insects. He coined the word "cell" and speculated on cellular function in plants. Hooke's text is accompanied by a series of extraordinary engravings, said to be by the architect Christopher Wren, that vividly illustrate the writer's observations, especially those of familiar insects (the flea, the fly, the ant, the gnat, the wood louse), creatures that would be terrifying if they shared our scale. Greatly magnified by Hooke's lenses, the insects are as mysterious and as menacing as Bontecou's wire-and-fabric structures, built around black holes. Hooke's wood louse is shown erect, holding a single hair like a spear in one of its six arms. It looks like a heavily armed warrior, with a horned helmet and a vicious forked tail. Hooke's flea is a creature as ornamental and intimidating as a warhorse in Nuremberg armor—or a futuristic war vehicle, the mere sight of which, if we could imagine a company of them in a science-fiction movie, enhanced through special effects, would cause an audience to scream. Bontecou's structures, executed in the early 1960s, lie at the intersection of magnified insects, battle masks and armored chariots, with the hole at once an aperture for looking through and a port for delivering missiles. It somehow diminishes them to call them sculptures.

Where do Bontecou's pieces stand in relation to the discourses that defined the art world of the 1960s? It was hard to say then, and it's no easier today. The originality and visceral force of Bontecou's work led many of her contemporaries—Judd, for instance—to try to assimilate it to their vision of what art should be. But, as we saw, Judd was sensitive to aspects of her work that had little to do with the philosophical project of redefining the art object; hence his untypical reference to terror, war and sex. "She emerged too late for abstract expressionism," Donna De Salvo writes in her catalogue essay, "and too early for pop art or minimalism, raising a question that has followed throughout her career: where does her work belong?" In his contribution Robert Storr links her with European artists like Alberto Burri (whose works were made of burlap sacking) and

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Lucio Fontana (best known for his slashed canvases), without really suggesting that these affinities have much by way of explanatory power. There is always a curatorial impulse to absorb art into the narratives of art history. The immense advantage of seeing those works of the 1960s in the retrospective context of what preceded them and what she went on to do is that it demonstrates that Bontecou was in no primary way in dialogue with her contemporaries. One feels that she was somehow in touch with the background violence of the decade, far more so than any of the movements that constitute its art history, which was caught up with the question of defining art and achieving aesthetic purity. If she has a peer in that period, it would be Eva Hesse, another maverick sculptor, who died at more or less the same time that Bontecou left the scene. Both of them were eccentric originals, portending the radical pluralism that overtook the art world in the next generation.

In the Artist's Statement with which the catalogue properly begins, Bontecou writes:

> Since my early years until now, the natural world and its visual wonders and horrors—man-made devices with their mind-boggling engineering feats and destructive abominations, elusive human nature and its multiple ramifications from the sublime to unbelievable abhorrences—to me are all one.

And she adds: "We were all lucky to be working in art at such an exciting time of exploration." The 1960s made her possible without in any serious way accounting for what she achieved. From what I can tell, Bontecou abandoned the kinds of objects with which she will always be identified before she abandoned the art world itself—gave up making these "destructive abominations" and "unbelievable abhorrences"—in favor of objects of transparent fragility, evoking the wonders of the natural world. There is certainly the kind of continuity with the early work that justifies her saying that "it is all one" to her. She still uses welded armatures, to which pieces of fabric are fastened with twisted wire. There is always the acid taste of edginess. But the fearsomeness has more or less vanished or been naturalized, as in the armored fish she makes. Had she done everything in the show except those early objects of otherworldly monstrosity, she would certainly have been a wonderful artist. But would anyone have wondered whatever happened to her had she stopped showing them, even if she continued to make more of them for her own sake or theirs? ■

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MONTPELIER, VT, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP is meeting. For information call (802) 229-9918 or e-mail lnichol@together.net.

GIG HARBOR, WA, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP is seeking new members. Call Bill Nerin (253) 851-8888 or e-mail nerins@earthlink.net.

ORGANIZATIONS

NORTH JERSEY *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP: Coordinator is Trudy Anschuetz, phone (973) 746-4135 e-mail TGOBLUE1@aol.com.

BRANDON, FL, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP FORMING. Contact Mary, (813) 689-8859.

PLEASANTON CA, Fremont, San Ramon, Danville, Dublin, Livermore *Nation* discussion group now forming. Call John @ (925) 462-6815 or e-mail supervalue10@aol.com.

POLICY

END THE DRUG WAR: See www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org, www.DrugWarFacts.org, www.DRCNet.org, www.MedicalMJ.org, www.DrugSense.org, www.AddictInTheFamily.org.

POSITION AVAILABLE

***THE NATION* SEEKS AN EXPERIENCED PRODUCTION DIRECTOR.** Position will be responsible for production and basic design of weekly magazine and other printed materials, budgeting, management of work flow and weekly production of the magazine's website. Candidate should have in-depth knowledge of current desktop publishing technology (QuarkXPress, QPS, Photoshop, Illustrator, Acrobat). Adobe InDesign and HTML experience a plus. We're looking for a highly motivated, energetic professional with 8+ years of print production/management experience, including strong knowledge of pre-press, offset web press and finishing capabilities/limitations. Director will create production technology migration strategy and budget, and manage 2005 software migration. Ability to work well with a wide array of people and departments and a strict adherence to deadlines essential. In addition to competitive salary, we offer generous benefits and an excellent work atmosphere. Equal opportunity employer, people of color and other minorities strongly encouraged to apply. E-mail résumé to: jobprod@thenation.com or mail to: The Nation, Production Director Search, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003 or fax to (212) 982-7193.

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WOMAN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, PhD, 25 years' experience. Insight-oriented and analytic. Free consultation. Sliding scale. Mutually agreed-upon fees. Insurance accepted. Carnegie Hall vicinity. (212) 582-5508.

SAN FRANCISCO PSYCHOTHERAPIST treats depression, relationship issues, anxiety, crises. Consultation available. Sliding scale. Paula Holt, LCSW, (415) 289-6990.

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SCHOOL VOLUNTEER

LONGTIME MOVEMENT PERSON and experienced teacher looking to volunteer in elementary classroom. DonMcKelvey@earthlink.net for info and references.

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TRAVEL/TOURS

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WEBSITES

HILARIOUS, BITING satirical letters to Bush, Cheney, Condi, Mel Gibson et al. Regular updates. www.paulchasman.com.

THE REAL DEAL? Untouched by the Carlyle Group, Halliburton, Bechtel, White House, House of Bush and House of Saud. Straightforward talk at the independent, Washington, DC–based, WWW.SAUDIPOLITICS.COM.

ONLINE MAGAZINE showcasing progressive artists. Political cartoons, poetry, stories, essays, activism. www.purgatorius.org.

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Rates and Frequency Discounts: STANDARD $3.50/word, 15-word minimum; PO Box and telephone numbers count as two words.

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Buy 24 runs, pay $2.75 per word
Buy 47 runs, pay $2.25 per word

Logos: We will print your logo and center the headline of your advertisement for an additional fee of $45/insertion. Maximum size for a logo is 2 1/4″ wide by 1/2″ deep. Stat of logo should accompany ad copy and payment.

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For all ads please include your name, address and contact phone number with your ad. You can fax your classifieds to us at (212) 982-9000 or e-mail leigh@thenation.com.

Attach ad, typewritten if possible.

The Nation, Classified Department, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003

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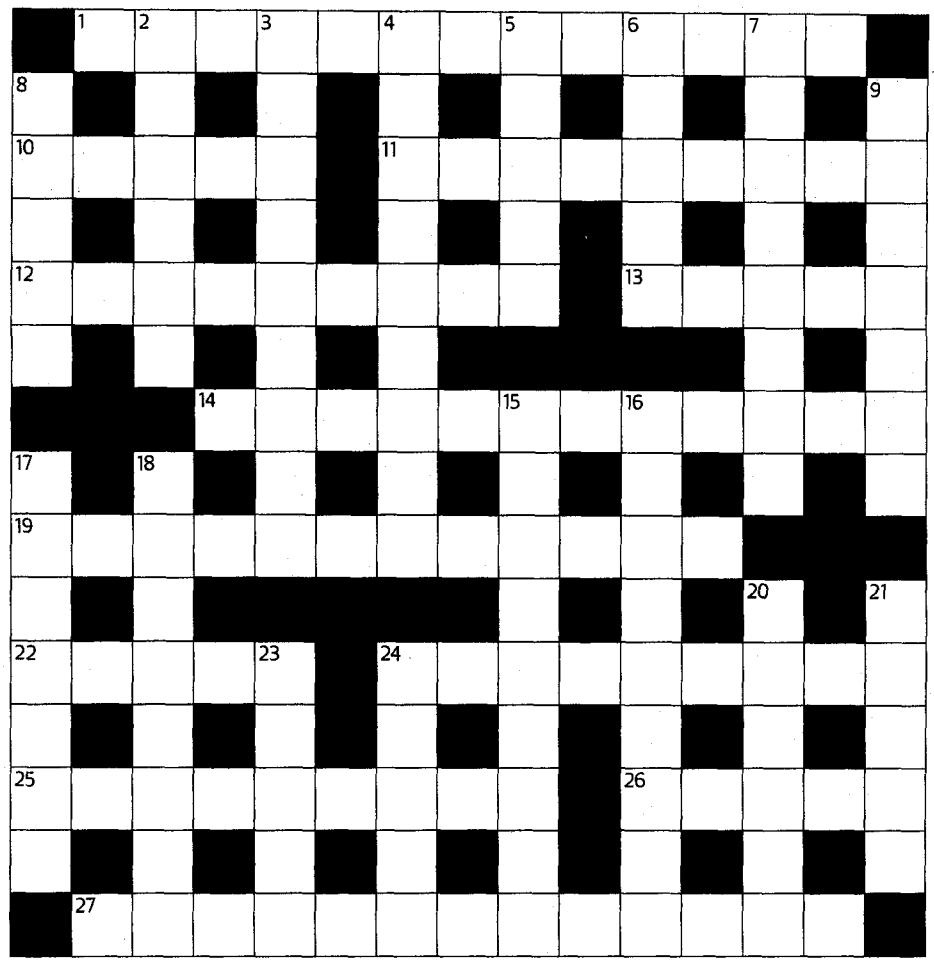
PUZZLE NO. 2955

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Where one should not put two needles, similarly. (2,3,4,4)

10 Possibly rates a place in your garden for it? (5)

11 The entrance area has nothing but a tiny point for celebration—boo! (9)

12 One doesn't like to find them the closeted—they're just too bare-boned! (9)

13 Describing Kipling's hand of dominion, which we consider pretty bad. (5)

14 Telephone booths? (They have a lot to say!) (12)

19 Matches even I find a bit difficult, but such may be what you hope to accomplish. (12)

22 It may supply a substitute for chocolate, which makes a comeback with boracic acid, initially. (5)

24 The newspapers, as they say, get sure disturbed by them—which is the cause of some anxiety. (9)

25 Not exactly a a cat's-paw, showing just how the timid sometimes get around things. (9)

26 A nice-looking birdie? Even better, as a matter of course. (5)

27 It seems to be able to pick up nothing—but it might come in handy around the house. (6,7)

DOWN

2 Obtained as a final result what fish might be, and tennis balls shouldn't. (6)

3 It's lucky a nail could keep it from being lost! (9)

4 Eton 0, Harrow 0—the old one supposedly belongs to the Old Boy. (6,3)

5 The shopping places that put everything in writing? (5)

6 Perhaps played by a character in Shakespeare. (5)

7 A single-minded person might be accused of having one, but what is charged comes up in a Dixie problem. (4,4)

8 Spare parts for what the grammarian might do. (5)

9 Any last difficulty might be present for one who takes things to pieces. (7)

15 Sherlock often implied to Watson that things were necessarily so, which disturbed Lee, who found it slightly daft. (9)

16 The thing that might clean up a female graduate created a Solomon! (9)

17 Reckless types with crazy hats. (7)

18 March is a peculiar setting for a divinely conferred gift. (8)

20 Might be found on the tongue of a shoe? (6)

21 A willow has sore consequences when I am found in the middle of it. (5)

23 What a hound might do, or in Paris where you might find sluggish water. (5)

24 The moper might be confused by the introductory discourse, but verse is about right here. (5)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2954

P	I	N	G	P	O	N	G	■	T	A	B	L	E	S
U	■	A	■	O	■	E	■	B	■	N	■	I	■	C
T	W	I	T	T	E	R	■	O	C	T	O	B	E	R
O	■	V	■	T	■	V	■	D	■	E	■	R	■	E
U	S	E	R	S	■	O	V	E	R	S	T	A	T	E
T	■	■	■	T	■	U	■	G	■	■	■	R	■	N
O	U	T	T	O	■	S	T	A	N	D	S	I	N	■
F	■	H	■	W	■	■	■	■	■	E	■	A	■	S
■	C	O	G	N	A	T	E	S	■	L	U	N	C	H
A	■	R	■	■	■	W	■	I	■	U	■	■	■	O
C	O	N	G	E	R	I	E	S	■	S	M	O	K	E
T	■	D	■	X	■	T	■	T	■	I	■	R	■	L
I	D	I	O	T	I	C	■	I	R	O	N	A	G	E
O	■	K	■	O	■	H	■	N	■	N	■	N	■	S
N	E	E	D	L	E	■	M	E	S	S	A	G	E	S

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Relaxation therapy for your feet

Visco-elastic foam has changed the way people sleep, now it helps the way you walk.

by Leigh Ligon

My feet hurt! How many times have you heard *or* said that...standing in line at the grocery store or simply while doing daily routine tasks? I feel like the older I get the more my feet ache. I've tried elevating my feet, soaking them in hot water and expensive massage therapy—but to no avail. That's why I'm so excited to tell you about my recent discovery—CLOUD 10 Slippers!

How did a NASA invention save my feet? From the moment I slipped them on, they molded to the shape of my feet like I had a custom fit pair of slippers made especially for me! The slipper's insole is made from visco-elastic memory foam originally created by NASA. This foam equalizes pressure, reduces stress and tension and provides incredible comfort.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, as people age, their feet tend to spread, and lose the fatty pads that cushion the bottom of the feet. Additional weight can affect the bone and ligament structure. These slippers mold to the contours of my feet through my body's heat and weight, literally cushioning every single step I take.

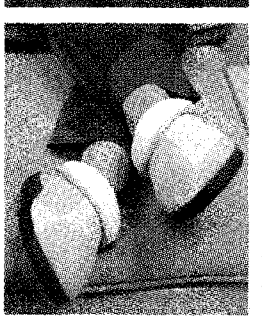
Technologically advanced slippers mold to the contours of your feet making each step feel like your walking on Cloud 10!

Did you know that the average person takes 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day, which adds up to about 115,000 miles over a lifetime? That's enough to go around the circumference of the earth four times. No wonder we all have tired, aching feet.

I've heard about similar kinds of slippers, but I couldn't afford to spend nearly $70 a pair. The Cloud 10 Slippers were a much better fit for my budget. The outer material of these stylish slippers is beautiful tan faux suede and they feature a cozy, fleece-lined interior and collar to provide added warmth. The durable rubber sole is perfect for my quick trips outdoors to grab the morning paper.

❖ *Inner sole is constructed from visco-elastic memory foam*
❖ *Body heat molds foam to cushion feet for maximum support*
❖ *Super-soft, fleece lining provides added warmth*
❖ *Durable rubber sole—perfect for quick outdoor trips!*

If you have arthritic feet like I do, you suffer from inflammation and pain in your joints. Our feet have to last a lifetime and I've decided to stop neglecting the part of my body that keeps me mobile.



These slippers have a unisex design making them great for both men and women. I wear my Cloud 10 Slippers every chance I get and my feet have never felt so pampered.

Sink your feet into luxury. We are so confident that CLOUD 10 slippers will cushion your feet in complete comfort that we will offer you a no-questions asked in-home trial for 30 days. If you're not 100% completely satisfied just return them for a full refund of the purchase price.

Call now to take advantage of this limited offer.

Cloud 10 Slippers
Unisex design —Medium or Large
Medium *(Women's 8-10 and Men's 7-9)*
Large *(Men's 10-12)*

$39.95 + S&H

Buy a second pair and S&H is free!

Please specify medium or large when ordering.

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(MINISERIES OR MOVIE MADE FOR TELEVISION)

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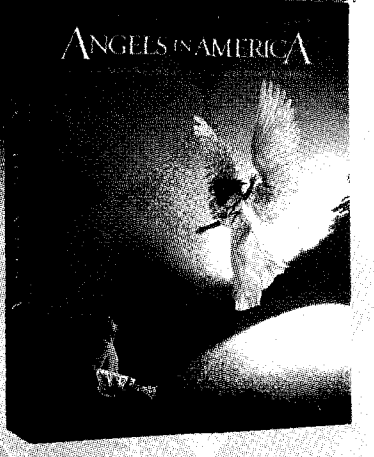
BEST ACTRESS - MERYL STREEP

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR - JEFFREY WRIGHT

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS - MARY-LOUISE PARKER



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